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Susanne Mathies

The Simulated Self – Fiction Reading and Narrative Identity

‘How can I have a complete identity without a mirror?’

(William Golding, *Pincher Martin*)

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

What does it mean to read, and to engage with, a work of fiction? In this thesis, I develop an account that explores the relation between fiction reading and the reader's narrative identity. Starting with an investigation of Paul Ricoeur's account of narrative identity and of Kendall Walton's account of the nature of representations, I set out and argue for my own model of fiction reading. My account is based on two starting assumptions: first, that human beings are entangled in stories throughout their lives, and second, that emotions are complex and have a narrative structure. I argue that during the reading process, the fiction reader creates her own narratives which contain not only the story provided by the work of fiction, but also event sequences from her own experiential memories. I investigate the creation and the influence of self-conscious emotions which are generated during the reading process, especially when a reader identifies with a fictional character from within. I consider how and why these fiction-induced emotions can continue after the reading is finished, and how these emotions can motivate the reader to engage in self-reflection and to refigure her self-narrative. My account examines a new topic: the interactive influence of fiction reading and the fiction reader's narrative identity.

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Editorial note

Special terms that I use in my thesis are explained in the glossary. These terms are printed in bold type the first time they appear in the text.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>PART I: NARRATIVE IDENTITY.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>1 Ricoeur's account of narrative identity.....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.1 Ricoeur and Hermeneutics	16
1.2 Idem and Ipse.....	18
1.3 The Self and Language.....	21
1.4 The Self and Action	23
1.5 Self-Ascription	26
1.6 Time Horizons of Idem and Ipse	28
1.7 Narrative and Mimesis.....	32
1.8 Emplotment and One's Own Story.....	39
1.9 Narrative Unity	45
1.10 Narrative Identity and Ethics.....	48
<i>2 Ricoeur's model in relation to other accounts of personal identity</i>	<i>52</i>
2.1 Examples of personal identity in question.....	53
2.2 Bodily Continuity Accounts (BCAs)	54
2.3 Psychological Connectedness Accounts (PCAs).....	56
2.3.1 Overview	56
2.3.2 Reductionism and what really matters.....	60
2.3.3 Reductionism and the Impersonal Description claim	64
2.4 Narrative Identity Accounts (NIAs).....	66
2.4.1 NIDA: do we narrate our lives?.....	69
2.4.2 NINA: does narrative provide a unity to one's life?	84
2.4.3 NIA: summing up	88
<i>PART II: READING AS A GAME OF MAKE-BELIEVE.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>3 Walton: the reader as a reflexive prop in a game of make-believe</i>	<i>91</i>
3.1 Overview.....	91
3.2 Criticism of Walton's model and open points.....	102
<i>PART III: THE SIMULATED SELF</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>4 The Simulated Self.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>5 Emotion as a structured experience</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>6 Within the reading process</i>	<i>118</i>
6.1 Levels of participation.....	118
6.2 The reader in two worlds – real and fictional	131
6.3 Example of the doppelgänger-function: reading John Williams' Stoner	145
<i>7 Beyond the reading process</i>	<i>148</i>
7.1 Emotions from fiction reading.....	151
7.2 Self-examination	161

8	<i>Filling out Ricoeur's account of fiction reading</i>	<i>170</i>
9	<i>Filling out Walton's account of fiction reading</i>	<i>188</i>
10	<i>Summary of Part III: The Simulated Self.....</i>	<i>195</i>
11	<i>Glossary</i>	<i>200</i>
12	<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>204</i>

List of illustrations

<i>Figure 1: Three levels of mimesis</i>	38
<i>Figure 2: The doppelgänger function</i>	133
<i>Figure 3: Empathy with a fictional other</i>	145
<i>Figure 4: Reading process Ricoeur 1</i>	171
<i>Figure 5: Reading process Ricoeur 2</i>	186
<i>Figure 6: Reading process Walton 1</i>	188
<i>Figure 7: Reading process Walton 2</i>	194

Introduction

What does it mean to read, and to engage with, a work of **fiction**? The reading experience often makes us readers feel absorbed in the fictional events, as if we were transported into a world apart from our daily lives. The deepest absorption occurs when we manage to empathize with fictional characters. Many readers value fiction reading in particular because it offers them the possibility of escaping from their usual troubles and imagining a different life, experienced through a fictional person in a story. In fiction, there are no constraints as to what can happen in the story, with the exception of those imposed by the work of fiction itself. We can slay a dragon to save a princess, gain intimate knowledge of the prostitutes of Montparnasse, or ride to the South Seas along an iron equator belt on a horse on roller-skates. We do not need to explain or justify what we imagine when we are engaged with a work of fiction. Compared to the risks we run in real life, the risks of reading fiction lie in different areas, and they appear to be less pressing. Whereas real life has to be continually negotiated with the world and society, imagining fiction needs only to be negotiated with our **self**, our hopes and fears and our moral values, and we can do that at our leisure. Reading can be uplifting and pleasant, or disturbing, or emotion-provoking. Reading can arouse strong feelings, especially when we feel for a fictional character from within. We rave against repression together with Jane Eyre, bursting with outrage against her cousin who plays her nasty tricks and gets away with it. We feel the dagger in our heart when Scarlett O'Hara finally realizes that she loves Rhett Butler, and is rejected by him. We feel the desperation of not being able to clear ourselves from unjust suspicion with Oliver Twist who realises that his benefactor must take him to be a thief.

What exactly happens to us when are deeply engaged with a work of fiction, and how does our reading experience relate to our real life, in the real world? We would not be able to experience emotions in the fictional world unless there was some connection between the two worlds, between what we perceive and feel in the fictional world and what we have experienced in the real world in the past, what made us who we are. This connection can only be brought about by us, by the reader herself. Our lived self is engaged with a work of fiction – even if we leave our daily concerns outside, there is something of our self which we bring into the reading process. What is the relation between our own life story and the fictional story we enter? This question has not yet been fully explored, and in my account of fiction reading, I use a new approach to gain deeper insights into this issue.

My account is based on the assumption that, as Wilhelm Schapp puts it, we human beings are always entangled in stories.¹ Stories put us into relationships with others, and these relationships can be the cause of emotions. This does not only happen during our daily lives, with real people, but also during fiction reading, with fictional people. The fiction reader tends to create different kinds of **narrative** which are more or less loosely based on the work of fiction. In these narratives, both the reader herself and the fictional character are somehow entangled in the story. I am particularly interested in the nature of these entanglements: how they emerge, who is in the lead, how they are driven, and what consequences they have for the reader. Hence, narratives play an important part in my inquiry.

I argue that, typically, the fiction reader does not get entangled only in one narrative, but in several narratives. In each of these narratives, there is a different kind of relationship between the reader and the fictional character she is interested in. In my model of fiction reading, I categorize three different kinds of narrative that the reader develops during the reading process. For each of these kinds of narrative, I explore how emotions can be evoked, how these emotions can develop, and how they can influence the reader's self and her **self-narrative**.

There have already been endeavours to explore the connections between fiction reading and the reader's self,² but they have not used the concept of narrative to illuminate the degree and the possible development of the reader's involvement with a work of fiction. My contribution to already existing accounts of fiction reading is built upon understanding the connection between the reader's narrative identity and the narratives which emerge during the reading process.

As a basis for my investigations, I bring together the works of two very different writers on narrative: Paul Ricoeur and Kendall Walton. I create my own model of fiction reading, drawing on, but also extending, both of these accounts. Paul Ricoeur's account of personal identity differs from other accounts by introducing a hermeneutic approach to examining a person's self. It is part of Ricoeur's account of narrative identity that we engage with fiction to develop our identities, and it is part of Walton's account that our engaging with fiction has an impact on our lives. As well as showing how each of these accounts can help to fill a significant gap in the other, I shall

¹ 'Wir Menschen sind immer in Geschichten verstrickt.', Schapp 2012, 1.

² See especially Goldie 2012, Keen 2010, Stroud 2008, Coplan 2004, Walsh 2003, Ricoeur 1992, Ricoeur 1991d, Ricoeur 1988, Iser 1972.

argue that important lacunae remain with respect to the influence of fiction reading on the reader's self. I fill the lacunae in their accounts with my own model of fiction reading.

Part I of this thesis provides an introduction to and a discussion of Ricoeur's account of narrative identity. Contemporary philosophy provides theories that attempt to explain how personal identity is constituted, and how it persists over time. Among these models, accounts of narrative identity have been gaining importance in recent discussion.³ In his model of narrative identity, Ricoeur holds that a person represents her self by a narrative that she weaves, and continuously refigures, across the events of her life. In this process, a person has two roles: she is the author of her own life in as far as she integrates the contingencies of the past into her on-going story, and she is also the protagonist in her own narrative. Ricoeur says that fiction reading plays an important part in the refiguration process of our self-narrative. By identifying with characters in fictional stories, we test and evaluate various ways of interacting with the world in our imagination and apply some of them to our self-narrative. Thus, reading fiction helps to shape our narrative identity.

Regarding the reading process as such, however, Ricoeur is content to describe the reader as engaging in thought experiments which can – after reflection – influence the reader's self-narrative. He does not investigate how the reader can develop real-life emotions during the reading process, or how reading-induced emotions can be instrumental in leading the reader towards self-reflection. These are significant gaps in his model, and filling them will give a fuller insight into the process of self-reflection and the development of self-narrative.

Part II gives an overview of Walton's account of engaging with a work of fiction. In aesthetics, Walton cast a new light on the role of the reader and her emotions by developing a theory about the nature of representations. He interprets the reader's engagement with a work of fiction as participating in a game of make-believe. Hence, Walton's account has the potential to help to fill the gap that I have identified in Ricoeur's account.

However, Walton's account is also incomplete in two respects. According to Walton, the reader accepts the rules of the fictional world prescribed by the author, and makes-believe that the characters in the novel exist, and that he feels for them 'from the

³ See especially Schechtman 2014, Goldie 2012, Atkins 2008, Strawson 2007.

inside'. Walton himself lists among the things that are still left to do to complement his model 'the specific ways in which such participatory experiences contribute to our lives'.⁴ Ricoeur's account of narrative identity can contribute to fill this gap in Walton's theory.

The additional gap I see in Walton's account is that when he is considering the affective impact of fictions, he focusses exclusively on episodic experiences rather than long-term changes. For Walton, the reader's engagement with a fictional work leads to physiological-psychological states that can be identified as the affective part of an emotion. Walton does not go beyond the immediate emotional effects of fiction-reading. I argue that the reading experience, in connection with accompanying imaginings, often triggers a chain of self-conscious emotions in the reader, even if the starting point was only a fiction-induced affective state. In my view, this is an important link between the reading experience and the reader's subsequent self-reflection. In order to account for this, I will develop a new account of fiction-reading.

In Part III, the main body of my work, I lay out my own account and show how it fills the gaps in both Ricoeur's and Walton's account of the reader's role in fiction reading. I do this by examining four questions:

- 1) What happens to the reader when she imagines a **character(f)**⁵ from within?
- 2) Which kinds of narrative are created or influenced during fiction reading?
- 3) How can emotions be evoked during fiction reading?
- 4) If fiction reading leads to self-examination, does this also direct the reader towards a more realistic self-narrative?

Current accounts of fiction reading focus primarily on the question of whether fiction reading has an influence on the reader's future actions. The attention paid to this issue is important from an ethical and educational point of view, but it tends to neglect the intricate fabric of emotions that is triggered within the reader whilst they are reading. This web of emotions is not measurable from the outside, by observation of the reader's actions, but only from inside, from the reader's self and the story which weaves her life together with the world she lives in. The outcome of my investigations will be a deeper

⁴ Walton 1990, 273.

⁵ In my discussion, the term 'character' is used in two different senses, either to denote a fictional character, or the character traits of a person. To differentiate between them, and to avoid confusion, I use different notations: 'character(f)' is a fictional character in a work of fiction, and '**character(p)**' is character as an aspect of a person.

understanding of the effects of fiction reading on a person's narrative identity, and thus, on her self and her self-unity.

A Plan of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Part I focusses on Ricoeur's model of narrative identity. In chapter 1, I give an overview of his account. An important feature of Ricoeur's account is the definition of two aspects of personal identity which are not reducible to each other: the object (**idem**) and the lived self (**ipse**). In chapter 2, I compare Ricoeur's model to other accounts of personal identity (psychological continuity accounts, bodily continuity accounts, other narrative identity accounts). This chapter includes a critical evaluation of the accounts of Derek Parfit, Eric Olson, Marya Schechtman, Kim Atkins, Christine Korsgaard, Peter Goldie, and Galen Strawson. I explain why Ricoeur's model gives a richer account of personal identity than these other models.

In Part II, I present Kendall Walton's account of fiction reading. In chapter 3, I give an overview of his model of fiction reading as a game of make-believe, focussing on the topic of reader participation in fiction. I also discuss critical objections to this account by Noel Carroll and John Gibson. I show that Walton's account of the reader's playing a game is compatible with Ricoeur's account of narrative identity. I also identify a gap in Walton's account, which I am going to fill by the account I offer in Part III.

The main body of my own account is contained in Part III.

In chapter 4, I give a high-level outline of my complete model of fiction reading in connection with narrative identity.

As the investigation of emotions is important for my account, I outline the notion of emotions that I adopt in chapter 5. I assume that emotions are **intentional** and structured, and that they develop in a way that takes narrative form.

In chapter 6, I investigate the reader's involvement in a work of fiction during her actual reading experience. I distinguish between three levels of participation in fiction reading, and I investigate what happens to the reader when she identifies with a character(f) from the inside. I define three types of narrative the reader can be involved in while engaging with a work of fiction: the **other-narrative**, the **self-in-other-**

narrative, and the **other-in-self-narrative**. This is an important step for the development of my account: in the following chapter I claim that these three types of narrative differ regarding the chain of emotions they can invoke in the reader.

In chapter 7, I pick up the notion of the three types of narrative which the reader can weave during fiction reading, and I argue that each type of narrative can trigger a complex structure of emotions. However, there are typical emotion chains for each of these narrative types. I say that self-conscious emotions play an important part in this, and I investigate the nature of reading-induced self-reflection. I argue that self-reflection is usually caused by self-conscious emotions, and that the nature of these emotions governs the depth and the direction of self-reflection.

In chapter 8, I compare my account of fiction reading with Ricoeur's account. I argue that although Ricoeur does think that the reader's emotions form an important factor in the reading process, he stops exploring them too early. Ricoeur says that catharsis frees the reader from emotions, thus enabling her to learn from fiction. I challenge this view, pointing out that the emotions generated by fiction reading are too complex to be represented in this simple way. In addition to this, I argue that Ricoeur's account of self-reflection is too optimistic. In my view, self-reflection does not always, as Ricoeur claims, lead to a more realistic self-narrative and an improved self-unity.

In chapter 9, I compare my account of fiction reading with Walton's account. I argue that Walton does not pay enough attention to the imaginings the reader has alongside the imaginings prescribed by the text. These subsidiary imaginings link the reader's experiential memories and their own mini-stories to the fictional story. I argue that the subsidiary imaginings play a large role in the development of the self-in-other- and the other-in-self-narrative, and that they often spawn chains of self-conscious emotions. Walton does not investigate how the emotions which are generated during fiction reading persist and develop within or beyond the reading process. Hence, he misses the opportunity to explore reading-induced self-reflection and its possible consequences for the reader's self-narrative and self-unity.

In the summary of Part III, I recapitulate my account of the influence of fiction reading on the reader's narrative identity. As a main point, I stress the importance of investigating the different kinds of narrative the reader weaves around the fictional text. These narratives can be sources of self-conscious emotions which often persevere after the reading process, urging the reader to reflect on her self-narrative, and sometimes to refigure it.

PART I: NARRATIVE IDENTITY

1 Ricoeur's account of narrative identity

In this chapter, I am going to outline Paul Ricoeur's account of narrative identity as he presents it. His work follows the tradition of so-called Continental Philosophy, which takes a different approach to questions of personal identity than the Lockean approach standardly taken within what is commonly understood as Analytic Philosophy. Ricoeur searches for the 'hermeneutics of self',⁶ combining the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology with philosophical hermeneutics.⁷

In his main work on this topic, *The Self as Another* (1992), Ricoeur is primarily concerned with the central dilemma from which human beings suffer. As we are embodied, and experience the world around us through our body, we are subject to the restraints to which the physical world submits us. But we also see ourselves as agents and feel responsible for our actions. We are both objects and agents in our lives. This tension is often illustrated by the example of a person grasping her own hand. She experiences touching her hand as if it was an object, and at the same time she has the subjective feeling of being touched.

I perceive my own body as both a subject and an object. Because of this ambiguity, my self cannot be completely reduced to a physical object, and my perception of myself is active as well as passive.⁸ The irreducibility of these two aspects of personal identity plays a pivotal role in Ricoeur's account of narrative identity.

In sections 1.1 to 1.6 of this chapter, I am going to show how Ricoeur derives his two-level view of personal identity (objective and subjective) from factors that influence the human situation: perception, embodiment, action, and responsibility. As a next step, in sections 1.7 and 1.8, I am going to outline Ricoeur's view of **mimesis** as story-telling, and of the links between fiction and self-narrative. Finally, in sections 1.9 and 1.10, I shall set out where Ricoeur sees connections between narrative unity and the unity of one's own life.

⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 4.

⁷ I shall explain this in detail in the next section.

⁸ Atkins 2005, chapter 4.

1.1 Ricoeur and Hermeneutics

As a first step towards presenting Ricoeur's account of narrative identity, I shall give a brief summary of the philosophical framework on which he builds his model. He embeds his theory in two interconnected fields of research: phenomenology and hermeneutics. Being embodied in the world, he says, gives us sensations which provide an inseparable link between body and mind. Every sensation which we experience has a horizon of its own, extending over space and time. The structure of such an experience can be read and interpreted using the tools of hermeneutics. As Ricoeur's model of narrative identity hinges on the link between the body and the experienced self, I shall outline the main points of phenomenological hermeneutics in this section.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophical discipline investigates the structure of different kinds of experiences. It deals with what experiences 'feel like' in our acts of consciousness. For philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty⁹, phenomenology does not restrict itself to investigating sensory experiences such as seeing, touching or hearing, but also includes the way in which we experience memory, emotion, volition, embodied action, social activity, and the self. The structure of these experiences requires intentionality – the experience is always directed towards an object of our lived world. Husserl holds that this directedness is possible only through the mediation of particular concepts or images.¹⁰

Husserl's method of reduction or epoché (bracketing) stipulates that all naturalistic assumptions about the world must be put 'out of play' so that the phenomenologist can attend to the phenomenological mode of presentation of objects without importing naive presuppositions about their attributes or their existence.¹¹ In the phenomenological mode of presentation, the focus is on my experience of the perceived object, and specifically the content or meaning of the object in my experience. The phenomenological presentation of objects depends on instruments that mediate between

⁹ Merleau-Ponty 2005

¹⁰ Smith 2011.

¹¹ Husserl 1997, 91.

the world and the experiencer. These instruments are the sensory organs (of sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) given by human embodiment.

Where the experience of being an embodied worldly subject is concerned, Merleau-Ponty claims that the essence of subjectivity is bound up with that of the body and that of the world because the subject that I am cannot be separated from my body and the world I live in.¹² In opposition to the Cartesian model which separates mind and body, Merleau-Ponty holds that thoughts and sensations are possible only if there is a background of perceptual activity that we already understand in terms of the body.¹³ Here, Merleau-Ponty goes a step further than Husserl regarding the role he sees for human embodiment. For Husserl, bodily intentionality is a phenomenon that bridges the gap between consciousness (the subject world) and reality (the object world). Merleau-Ponty has the stronger view that the body in its perceptual capacity can be equated to the lived I. For Merleau-Ponty, embodiment blurs the distinction between subject and object: 'When we say that the perceived thing is grasped "in person" or "in the flesh" (*leibhaft*), this is to be taken literally: the flesh of what is perceived, this compact particle which stops exploration, and this optimum which terminates it, all reflect my own incarnation and are its counterpart'.¹⁴

Phenomenological hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, the philosophical study of interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions, is not only applicable to texts but also to forms of human consciousness.¹⁵ The branch of hermeneutics that examines human awareness is known as phenomenological hermeneutics.

Phenomenological hermeneutical research investigates the ways in which the structures of awareness influence our processes of understanding. One particularly important type of structure is the spatio-temporal horizon. No matter which objects I am concerned with in perception, I experience them as being in a world that extends spatially and temporally beyond my current situation. In an individual experience, I expect some of the objects I perceive to have additional attributes to the ones I currently perceive through my senses: I expect them to carry on existing for some span of time

¹² Husserl 2005, 255.

¹³ Carman 1999, 206.

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty 1964, 167.

¹⁵ Mantzavinos 2016.

into the future, so that I will be able to perceive them during that future time period as well if I choose, and I often expect that I may have different sensory experiences of them in the future.

All individual experiences have a subjective ‘horizon’ which reflects the relationship between the subject and the object. These experiences change with the subject-object relationship they are depending on and with the alteration of this relationship itself as it unfolds over time. They constitute what Husserl calls an ‘intentional horizon’¹⁶ of reference. The intentional horizon refers to the possibilities of consciousness within the subject-object relationship. This means that I do not only perceive the object as presented to me by my senses, but I am also aware of other aspects of it that my experience horizon of this object already includes as possible. If I have a perceptual experience of a flower in a meadow, for instance, I am immediately aware of its shape and colour, maybe even its smell. But I also anticipate that if I step forward and grasp the stem, I will feel its texture, and the reluctance of its roots in the earth when I try to pull it out. The flower, the object of my perception, already transcends the information currently observable by me – the horizon of my flower-perception goes beyond my sensual observation.

The importance of the human body for phenomenological experiences, and the investigation of the different time horizons which can be distinguished in connection with personal identity, are the two key themes in Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity.

1.2 Idem and Ipse

Ricoeur’s account of personal identity differs from other accounts of personal identity in one central and very important respect: he examines personal identity on two levels, using two different categories. On the metaphysical level, personal identity is defined by sameness (Latin: *idem*), and this concerns the person as a spatial-temporal object. The *idem* provides the answer to the question ‘What am I?’. The *idem* relates to all attributes of a person that tend to be permanent over a long-time horizon, including for instance the body, the genetic code, and the character(p). Character(p), as Ricoeur uses it in this context, defines the set of lasting dispositions by which a person can be

¹⁶ Beyer 2007, chapter 4.

recognized.¹⁷ Although character(p) is subject to (usually slow) changes over time, Ricoeur sees it as part of the idem because it concerns the objective aspect of personal identity. Persons can be identified from the outside by their character(p): we feel justified to make statements like: ‘he is reliable’ or ‘she is unforgiving’.

On a phenomenological level, personal identity is represented by the self (Latin: ipse). The ipse is the experienced or lived identity of a person, the feature that distinguishes the ‘I’ from the ‘other’. One of its most important aspects is that it is constitutive of self-constancy, the perseverance of faithfulness to a promise. A prerequisite for the ipse is the ability of a person to make plans and enter obligations towards herself and others for the future. The ipse covers all areas of a person’s life where the personal pronoun ‘mine’ can be applied in the sense of ‘what I feel responsible for’. It answers the question ‘Who am I?’.¹⁸

Ricoeur describes the difference between idem and ipse as the ‘difference between a substantial or formal identification and a narrative identity’.¹⁹

In his development of a hermeneutics of self, Ricoeur examines what it means to belong to one’s own world and one’s own body, as they are experienced. Ricoeur describes the involved processes in hermeneutic terms, exploring how the lived embodied self is affected by constant interaction with the world: by feeling, acting, suffering, reflecting, and taking responsibility for her own actions. In Ricoeurian terminology, the interaction of the self with the world can be described as ‘a discourse of appropriation’ that involves the acceptance of one’s world and one’s body as one’s own. In contrast to this, the typical analytic approach is concerned with the objective world and the objective body in what Ricoeur calls a ‘discourse of distance’.²⁰ Ricoeur claims that the analytic examination of questions concerning personal identity is not sufficient to grasp all relevant aspects of the self.

Ricoeur also makes a point of distinguishing his own account of selfhood from the existential proposition of the Cogito that states ‘I think, therefore I am’. In particular, he claims that Descartes’ approach of extreme doubt only provides a proof of the ‘I’ which is atemporal and must thus be reasserted from moment to moment.²¹ He says that Descartes proves a purely formal ‘I’ as a subject which cannot answer the

¹⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 121.

¹⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 116.

¹⁹ Ricoeur 1984, 246.

²⁰ Hünefeldt 2005, 153.

²¹ Ricoeur 1992, 7.

question ‘what am I?’ as an object. According to Ricoeur, Descartes does not consider human embodiment as an aspect of personal identity, but as an unimportant contingency. Ricoeur says that if you view the body as nothing but an object, you lose important characteristics of consciousness. Consciousness is not contained within itself, but directed towards the outside world in two ways: through voluntary acts, willed by the self and carried out by the body, and through involuntary acts performed by the body.²²

Here, he adopts Sigmund Freud’s notion of the unconscious mind, saying: ‘The philosopher will not attribute thought to the unconscious, but he will admit the dependence of thought, which is consciousness itself, on a hidden psychic dynamism whose dramas often erupt at the very heart of consciousness and remove an entire region of intentions and actions from its control.’²³ Although Ricoeur investigated Freud’s views on psychoanalysis in great depth, he does not take this to be a basis for his account of personal identity as narrative identity. Rather, the point that he takes from Freud here is the view of the subconscious as the seat of repressed emotions.²⁴

Ricoeur also examines the other extreme, the ‘shattered Cogito’ philosophy proclaimed by Nietzsche who says that truth can never be determined as Nature ‘threw away the key’ – humans do not possess, and cannot develop, the tools necessary for unravelling Nature’s secrets.²⁵ This can be roughly paraphrased as ‘I may think that I think, but this does not establish any truth’. Ricoeur comes to the conclusion that this anti-Cogito does not, as it claims, prove Descartes’ argument wrong but instead destroys the original question (‘Can I know that I exist?’) to which the Cogito claims to give an absolute answer.²⁶ If I can never know the truth about anything, asking whether I know that I exist is just a silly question. Nietzsche holds that there is no distinction between lies and truth, that there is only illusion (Nietzsche calls this ‘*Verstellung*’), because Nature deprived man of the powers to decipher illusions.²⁷ For Ricoeur, this

²² Ricoeur 1966, 6.

²³ Ricoeur 1966, 400.

²⁴ Ricoeur’s views on Freud are still subject to ongoing discussions in philosophy, see for instance Carney, Eoin, ‘Technique and Understanding - Paul Ricoeur on Freud and the Analytic Experience’ *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, Vol 7, No 1 (2016), pp. 87-102. I shall not include these discussion in the scope of my work.

²⁵ Ricoeur 1992, 11.

²⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 14.

²⁷ ‘Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, daß sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind’ (‘Truths are illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors which have become shopworn and sensually weak’), Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, 1873 - Kapitel 1, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-3243/1>, my own translation.

claim is a paradox in itself: either Nietzsche's theory exempts itself from illusion, or it is itself a subject to it. Nietzsche claims to utter a truth, while saying that the truth can never be determined. Ricoeur describes this as a special case of the liar's paradox.²⁸

Thus, Ricoeur distances himself from both the Cogito and the anti-Cogito, but he does not intend to posit the self directly. Although he uses analytic methods in order to examine the validity of his intuitions, his hermeneutic research is different from the deductive style of analytic philosophy, as we shall see. He develops his account by investigating three areas: the linguistic use of the term 'I', the relation between personal identity and action, and the role of personal responsibility within the concept of personal identity.

To summarize this section: Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (the lived self) is a central part of his account. The following sections will show how these two aspects of personal identity – which cannot be reduced to each other – define a person, and how they are able to characterize and clarify changes of personal identity over time.

1.3 The Self and Language

Reference to the self begins with language. Ricoeur starts his exploration of the self on a linguistic level by examining how we identify ourselves. In a descriptive speech utterance that uses 'I' (for instance 'I see') there is a logical gap between the referential function that picks out the 'I' as a public entity that can be identified by others,²⁹ and the reflexive function that indicates the 'I' as a private entity that the utterer is conscious of, while speaking to a 'you'. An utterance which has a purely referential function is, for example, 'I was born on 9th May, 1953'. The utterance 'I feel embarrassed', on the other hand, is reflexive.

It is an important point for Ricoeur that the object the referential function points at, the 'I', is irreducible to any other kind of particular, such as, for instance, a brain, or a psychological history. The referential function indicates the 'I' as a 'basic particular'. Ricoeur follows Peter Strawson here who says that basic particulars belong to a distinguishable class of particulars that can be identified and re-identified without

²⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 12.

²⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 34.

reference to particulars of other kinds.³⁰ In Ricoeur's words, 'Physical bodies and the persons we ourselves are constitute, in this masterful strategy, such basic particulars in the sense that nothing at all can be identified unless it ultimately refers to one or the other of these two kinds of particulars.'³¹ When an utterer uses this referential function, she denotes herself as 'I' – that is, the person who is speaking. The complete signification of the 'I' in the objectified view, as uttered by the person herself, is achieved by the person's capacity for self-designation.

Thus, when talking about herself, the utterer can use either (or both) of two viewpoints: the 'I' as the person whom the utterer refers to when talking about herself as an entity, and the 'I' of the utterer as she experiences herself.

Ricoeur's distinction between the referential and reflexive functions of 'I' acknowledges the puzzling fact that the 'I' plays two roles: the one that speaks and the one of whom the utterer is speaking, the objectified aspect of the 'I'. When an utterer puts herself into a relation to the person spoken to, she exchanges information with a 'you', and this information can have different kinds of intentional object. For instance, if someone hurts me, and I say to him: 'I hate you', I as the utterer give information about my psychological state to my tormentor as the person spoken to. Typical (though not all) utterances of this kind concern the utterer's feelings, like 'I admire you' or 'I share your grief'. The objectified 'I' fades into the background because the utterer is only viewing herself from within. I do not give the person spoken to any information about myself except my psychological states as they relate to him or her, and the fact that I have these psychological states.

Regarding this reflexive function of the 'I', Ricoeur distinguishes between constative and performative speech.³² If the utterer makes a constative statement about herself, she describes a situation, an action, or a psychological state. In a performative statement about herself, however, the utterer also performs the action she describes. Here, the utterance does not refer to anything but this performance. A promise is an example of performative speech: it is a binding contract between utterer and person addressed. When an 'I' promises something to a 'you' in an utterance, this speech is already the actual promise.³³ If I say to my neighbour: 'I promise I will look after your children during the summer holidays', I inform my neighbour of my promise, and

³⁰ Strawson 1959, 38.

³¹ Ricoeur 1992, 31.

³² Here, Ricoeur refers to Austin 1962.

³³ Ricoeur 1992, 42.

simultaneously I take over the obligation to actually perform the baby-sitting for her. As shown in the previous section, entering obligations for the future is an important power of the self, the ipse. In performative speech, the language use links the ipse to her social nexus.

So far, Ricoeur's approach has shown that an utterer can refer to herself in two ways: in an objectified way, and in a reflexive way. She can also refer to a commitment she makes, through the utterance of a promise. But how are these three types of reference connected?

The referential and the reflexive approach to language theory can converge, Ricoeur claims, if the 'I' who is speaking to a 'you' and the 'him/her' of whom the utterer is speaking are assimilated in a 'unique type of objectification'.³⁴ This happens in utterances that contain both the referential and the reflexive viewpoint on the 'I' on the part of the utterer. For instance, if a father says to his son: 'Your father will always support you', he refers to himself objectively (speaking of himself, as seen from the outside, in his role as a father) and reflexively (speaking of his personal commitment).

Thus, the idem and the ipse work together in performative speech: By joint reference to the objective person and her subjective aims, they create a personal promise to the 'you' to whom it is uttered, and they constitute a personal obligation for the utterer.

1.4 The Self and Action

In the previous section, we saw how the objectified 'I' and the subjective 'I' can be represented in speech. Ricoeur's concept of action supplements his model of personal identity by showing the connection between the lived body that can be identified physically (the idem) and the sphere of mineness that I am conscious of (the ipse).³⁵ A person interacts with the world through her body, and her actions are visible from the outside, by others who attribute intentions and causes to them, as well as from the inside, by the person who plans and experiences them. But what exactly defines an action, what is its time horizon, and how is the agent involved in an action?

³⁴ Ricoeur 1992, 52.

³⁵ Harrison-Barbet 2008, 5.

For Ricoeur, it is important to get a clear analytic understanding of the terms ‘event’ and ‘action’ to complement the intuitive interpretation obtained by phenomenological experience. Ricoeur differentiates between event and action by saying that an event is – in general – something which happens (connected to the question ‘what?’), whereas an action is something for which a person is responsible (connected to the questions ‘who?’ and ‘why?’). The question ‘who?’ is the most important point for him. He sets out his own account against Donald Davidson’s theory of action to highlight why he thinks that this question is essential for an account of action. His comparison with Davidson’s account is not, however, intended to cover all of Davidson’s arguments. Ricoeur wants to drive home one particular point: the importance of personal responsibility, as seen from the inside of the agent, in contrast to an objective accountability which could be proved in court.³⁶ In Ricoeur’s view, Davidson is interested in the wrong question, ‘what?’, while neglecting the question ‘who?’. Although it is debatable whether this does justice to Davidson’s theory,³⁷ I am going to outline Ricoeur’s arguments here as they give a valuable insight into his own account.

Davidson holds that human action can be explained by applying the same concept of causality that we use to explain physical processes. Ricoeur interprets Davidson’s account as taking an exclusively external view. This is where Ricoeur pins his criticism: he says that it is not enough to get an objective view on an action to fully understand it: an action needs to be viewed from the perspective of the agent’s self. In Ricoeur’s view, Davidson neglects this aspect of human action. Davidson says that the agent’s intention can be derived from outside observation; Ricoeur says that this is not the case, not even when all externally measurable facts about the agent are known.

Davidson distinguishes actions from mere happenings by claiming that an agent has an intention to perform an action, whereas no intention is needed for a happening. He says that an action can be explained by a ‘primary reason’, which implies a pro attitude (a desire or goal) towards some not-yet-existing state of affairs, and a belief that the action is of the kind that brings about this state of affairs.³⁸ Thus, the ‘what?’ of the action is contained in the question ‘why?’, and, according to Ricoeur,

³⁶ He distances himself from Locke, who said: ‘“*Person*” a forensic term. Person, as I take it, is the name for this self. Wherever a man finds what he calls himself, there, I think, another may say is the same person.’ (Locke 1999, Book II Chapter XXVI).

³⁷ For a wider discussion, see for instance Child 2006 and van den Hengel 1996.

³⁸ Davidson 1963, 686.

such an explanation does not require an examination of how the consciousness of the agent changed over time (from the first motivation to act via the actual action to the final completion of the action's consequences), or of the impact the action has, has had, or will have, on the agent.

Ricoeur claims that Davidson misses a crucial point in his account of action. Davidson considers the intention with which an action is done, but not the temporal development of the act of intending. He examines acts which have already been finished, looking at them in retrospect.³⁹ For him, an intention can be either correctly or incorrectly identified; the naming of the intention has a truth value which is atemporal. What Davidson does not seem to consider, but what Ricoeur stresses as particularly important, is that intention is future-oriented before the action has started.⁴⁰ I can say: 'I intend to act', and my intention regarding this action may change over time. For instance, I may intend to give lilies to my girl friend, then change my intention in the florist's shop when their smell reminds me of a funeral, but later change it again when I remember how much my girl friend loves lilies. As Ricoeur puts it, 'anticipation operates during the entire unfolding of the action'.⁴¹

If the action is only analysed after it has been completed (this is what Ricoeur criticizes in Davidson's model), the planned effect of the agent's intention is substituted by the actual effect, and it cannot be determined how the causal intentions of the action's beginning, performance and completion were developing.⁴² Although Davidson also sees the importance of determining the agent's intention, he looks only for the trigger which starts the action. Any intentions the agent may have had before or afterwards are not part of his model. For instance, the sentence 'the man desired to rise in his girlfriend's estimation and believed that giving her lilies would achieve this' has a truth value in Davidson's model: either it is true or not true that the man wanted to rise in his girlfriend's estimation when he acted to give her lilies. For Ricoeur, this sentence would not be sufficient to characterize the action: he would only see the explanation as complete if we knew whether the man always intended to rise in his girlfriend's estimation – or whether he had any other intentions –, whether he learns something from the experience, and so on.

³⁹ van den Hengel, 238.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 79.

⁴¹ Ricoeur 1992, 82.

⁴² Ricoeur 1992, 80.

Hence, Ricoeur has two issues with Davidson's account: first, the fact that Davidson does not distinguish between the experienced and the observed action, and second, that Davidson only examines the intention of an act in retrospect, after the action was performed. The causes of some kinds of actions can be typified, for instance mechanical actions (like pushing or pulling a tractor), leading to general rules of causation. But for the explanation of actions that have a series of reasons that shift while the action is being performed one needs information about the action as it is experienced. Only the actor herself can say what her intention is. Stating this knowledge – which is practical knowledge, knowledge without observation – constitutes an **attestation** of the agent to the act which acknowledges responsibility and confirms the confidence of the actor in her ability to follow her intention. This can only be given by the actor herself, in an utterance regarding both her accountability and her intention. For this kind of utterance, truth values cannot be determined, only degrees of veracity.⁴³ She may be lying, or she may be telling the truth about the responsibility she has committed herself to.

Put in a nutshell, Ricoeur criticizes Davidson's account because its focus is analytic, not hermeneutic – he is accusing Davidson of asking the wrong question, while using Davidson's account as backdrop for expounding his own model. Ricoeur claims that Davidson neglects the moral imputation of an action to its agent and, especially, its influence on the development of the agent's self.⁴⁴ Ricoeur raises the question whether Davidson's ontology of events was not 'condemned to conceal the problematic of the agent as the *possessor* of his or her action'.⁴⁵ As we shall see in the next section, Ricoeur proceeds to re-examine the question of the relation of action to the agent with a special focus on the question 'who?', which is a central point in his account.

1.5 *Self-Ascription*

We are only able to interact consciously with the world we live in on a social level, Ricoeur claims, because we have the ability to ascribe our actions and our sufferings to our self, to an agent we identify as.

⁴³ Ricoeur 1992, 72/73.

⁴⁴ Harrison-Barbet 2008, 5.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur 1992, 85.

Ricoeur combines three claims from Strawson's account of personhood to define the term 'ascription'.⁴⁶ The first claim is that there are two kinds of predicate in connection with a person: material and psychological. These kinds of predicate cannot be reduced to each other. The second claim is that we attribute both material and psychological attributes to the same entity, the person. For instance, if we say that Donald Trump is a rude misogynist, we are referring to a single entity, the person Donald Trump. The third claim is that mental predicates such as intentions and motives can be attributed directly to a person. I can attribute intentions and motives to myself as my subject-attributes, and to someone else as their supposed subject-attributes. This process of attribution shows that I perceive myself to be a person who can be distinguished from other persons.

But – picking up Ricoeur's point from the previous section – the ascription of an action to an agent is only successful if it is linked to the agent's power to act. Having the power to act in a certain way means that I know what I want to change, what I want the outcome to be, and that I am confident that I have the physical, psychological and intellectual strength to perform the action. Ricoeur calls this 'a basic capacity' because it links the agent's intention with the real world. As Ricoeur puts it, a person's power to act is 'the basic capacity to make one of the things he or she knows how to do (knows he or she is able to do) coincide with an initial system-state, thereby determining the system's conditions of closure'.⁴⁷

Every action requires initiative, 'an *intervention* of the agent of action in the course of the world, an intervention which effectively causes changes in the world'.⁴⁸ Initiative is enabled by the power to act. It is, however, not the only causal influence on action. Initiative can be seen as both disjunctive and conjunctive regarding the agent's lived world: at one extreme, the original causality of the agent is antagonistic to other modes of causality, which are outside the agent's influence; at the other extreme, there is a synergy effect between the original agent's causality and other forms of causality, so that the forms of causality outside the agent's influence actually further the agent's action. For instance, if I want to pick up my dog, and he runs away from me, his behaviour is antagonistic to my initiative; if he jumps up to me, on the other hand, his action is synergetic to mine. The agent's initiative depends on a distinctive causal

⁴⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 88/89.

⁴⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 101.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 109.

capacity that cannot be reduced⁴⁹ to any other sort of causality, but can only manifest itself in conjunction with the other causalities of the agent's world. In this way, Ricoeur explains the relation we have to the world we are linked to through our embodiment: on the level of the lived self (the ipse), we ascribe motives and actions to ourselves, and on the level of our object identity (the idem), we perform actions in the world, either helped or hindered by its contingencies.

Establishing that the self is able to ascribe actions to herself is an important building block in Ricoeur's model of the self in its twofold role: as embodied, and as a living entity who can take responsibility for her own actions.

1.6 Time Horizons of Idem and Ipse

How is self-ascription, as described in the previous section, linked to Ricoeur's overall concept of personal identity? Self-ascription belongs to the concept of the lived self, the ipse, but taking responsibility also has consequences for objectified part of the I, the part by which a person can be identified from the outside. Are the promises I make consistent with my character? The answer to this question may depend on the time of asking.

For Ricoeur (in contrast to Descartes, as we saw in section 1.2) the question of identity is tied to that of temporality. He points out that 'the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends have a history, are their own history'.⁵⁰

The two aspects of personal identity that he defines, idem (sameness) and ipse (self), each have their own time horizon which is subject to change. In a constant **dialectic**⁵¹ between the idem and the ipse, these two horizons can overlap, or they can become distinct. For instance, a young man in a rural community might promise his father to work on the farm permanently after his studies, driven to this promise by his happily settled ways in the country: he likes to be responsible for the livestock, he likes to be respected for his physical strength, and he believes in stability. At this point in time, the time horizon of his character(p) and the time horizon of his promise overlap.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur uses the term 'reduce' in the non-eliminative explanatory sense.

⁵⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 113.

⁵¹ I am following Ricoeur's understanding of the term 'dialectic': a struggle between two positions, in the course of which each is becoming clearer, urging for a choice to end the **conflict**.

During his studies, however, he encounters new ideas and gets used to a new lifestyle. He now believes that it is more useful to spend his life in study, and he enjoys library research. His character(p) is no longer the same after many years of study, whereas his promise is still valid.⁵² The time horizon of his (former) character(p) has ended, but the time horizon of his promise has not.

Identity as sameness over time

Ricoeur criticizes analytic philosophers for conceiving of personal identity exclusively in terms of the identity of the idem.

Traditionally, the question of permanence in time starts with two concepts: first, with the definition of numerical identity as the relation that holds between two relata when they are the self-same entity, that is, when the terms designating them have the same reference, and second, the definition of qualitative identity as the relation that holds between two relata that have properties in common.⁵³ The concepts of numerical and qualitative identity are not reducible to each other. Ricoeur says that to get an understanding of personal identity over time, these definitions need to be supplemented by ‘*uninterrupted continuity*’⁵⁴ between the different stages of the individual whom we consider to be the same person. If the changes to a person are small between time t_n and time t_{n+1} , it seems safe to assume identity of a person at time t_n and time t_{n+1} . On the other hand, if we view a person at the time of their birth and in middle age, the difference seems so great that there appears to be a threat to identity.⁵⁵

To dissipate this threat, Ricoeur says, it is necessary to conceive a principle of permanence in time which is based on resemblance and uninterrupted continuity. Even if the threat to identity appears to be small, if the development of a person can be reconstructed over a long time period by following the gradual changes, a structure needs to be identified which shows that all of these changes have been happening to the same person. Hence, Ricoeur sees the necessity for a ‘relational invariant’⁵⁶, such as the structure of a tool that stays the same even if its parts are replaced.

⁵² As explained in section 1.2, Ricoeur counts the character(p) as part of the idem because it is one of the characteristics that make people recognizable from the outside. However, like the body, it is subject to slow changes over time.

⁵³ See <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/numerical-identity>.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur 1992, 117.

⁵⁵ For a detailed overview of these accounts, please see section 2.3 Psychological Connectedness Accounts.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 117.

Regarding identity as sameness, he suggests the genetic code as a good candidate to measure the identity of a biological organism.⁵⁷ But this criterion cannot apply to the identity of the self, which is the 'I' as it is experienced by the person herself, through which she enters obligations to the world she lives in. So Ricoeur looks for an identity criterion that is connected to the question 'who?' without reducing it to the question 'what?'.⁵⁸ He distinguishes between two models of permanence in time: character(p) and keeping one's word. The latter is a commitment towards a person, or persons, or a community.

In Ricoeur's terms, character(p) 'designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized'.⁵⁹ A disposition develops out of two activities: the formation of habits and the acquisition of identifications.

Habits develop over time and can have different status: they can be in the process of being newly formed, or they can be in an already acquired, 'sedimented' state. The sedimentation of habits has a tendency to cover innovations which occurred earlier. As habits turn into lasting dispositions, they constitute character traits. They provide the character(p) with a history. If the sedimentation is strong, and the lived habits match the character traits, the idem overlaps the ipse, and they operate in harmony.

Acquired identifications are the value predicates that a person takes over from the community she lives in. For instance, she may be known in her village as the parson's daughter, the brilliant brain, the quiet one, or the village witch. If she takes over the social values of her community, she enters the community identity to a certain extent. As a result, she can be identified by these common values. The community values are values that concern things beyond our own survival; they can, for instance, be common ideals or common customs which strengthen the bond of the community. If a person identifies with such community values, this incorporates an element of loyalty into her character(p) and turns it towards fidelity, which is a defining element of the ipse-self. When these identifications turn into lasting dispositions, they also become character(p) traits. This is where the two poles of identity are in harmony with one another: the committed self and the settled character(p) share the same goals and values.

⁵⁷ Considering the current state of research in body cloning, this would nowadays be seen as a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for bodily identity.

⁵⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 118.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 121.

If, however, either the self or the character(p) undergo any changes due to other influences, this harmony can be destroyed.

Character(p) has a history which is formed by two activities: the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation that takes place in habit acquisition, and the dialectic of the world's otherness and my internalization of its values that makes up the process of identification.⁶⁰

Identity as self-constancy over time

The other model of permanence in time mentioned above concerns faithfulness in keeping one's word, or self-constancy. Self-constancy is an achievement of the self which belongs to the dimension of 'who?'.⁶¹ If I give a promise to someone, I become accountable for it, and thus the action of promising has an ethical aspect. Word-keeping develops its own time horizon from the words spoken as well as the trust the other person puts in my faithfulness. For instance, if a colleague tells me that someone spoke badly of her, and I tell her: 'I'll back you up', we both understand that this concerns her current work situation, and my conversations with her boss in the coming weeks. Neither of us expects me to be true to this promise in ten years' time.

Holding one's promise within the pledged time horizon can be seen as a challenge against time: that I will honour my promise even if I should change my views on it, or my inclinations.⁶² For instance, I might suddenly see my colleague as a plagiarist of other people's ideas, thus not wanting to speak up for her any longer.

Two time horizons

If there is great permanence of character(p) over time, this means that the idem and the ipse overlap almost completely – the faithfulness of keeping one's word is always aligned with character(p). At the other extreme, a permanence of promise-keeping (self-constancy) – while the character(p) undergoes some change – indicates that there is a large gap between the self and the character(p). This shows that none of these polar notions can be reduced to the other.⁶³ In the extreme case of faithful promise-keeping

⁶⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 122.

⁶¹ Ricoeur 1992, 123.

⁶² Ricoeur 1992, 124.

⁶³ Ricoeur 1992, 118.

my character(p) (my idem) has changed, but my promise-keeping (my ipse) remains unchanged.

An example from fiction can illustrate this: in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*⁶⁴, Sarah makes a solemn promise to God that she will break off her affair if her lover's life is spared in the bomb attack. He survives, and as she is a devout believer, she keeps her word. For the rest of her life, she is miserable because her promise prevents her from being with her true love. Love has become more important to her than before, changing her outlook on life. Her promise-keeping self and her loving character(p) are far apart.

Viewing the sameness of character(p) and the constancy of the self in opposition raises the question of how these can be viewed as part of whole, in a model of personal identity.

Ricoeur stresses the necessity of such a model by examining the paradoxes of personal identity and the attempts made by other philosophers to overcome these paradoxes, in particular by Locke, Hume and Parfit.⁶⁵ He claims that none of them give a complete account of personal identity because they do not distinguish between idem and ipse.⁶⁶ By conflating these two aspects of personal identity, they fail to recognize the enduring dialectic between them.

1.7 Narrative and Mimesis

If there is, over time, a continuing struggle between a person's lived self and her objectified identity, how is this established? Ricoeur says that all events in a person's life are woven together in a fabric of a story, a self-narrative. To illustrate how and why this happens, he distinguishes three levels of narrative activity. In this section, I am going to show how Ricoeur links the concepts of idem and ipse to the concept of self-narrative through application of these different narrative activities.

As we have already seen in section 1.2, idem and ipse each have their own time horizon, which may or may not overlap. The development of idem and ipse over time is an important point in Ricoeur's account. The changes in a person's character(p) and in a

⁶⁴ Greene 1979.

⁶⁵ These accounts, Ricoeur's criticism of them, and state-of-the-art evaluations of these and other accounts of personal identity will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 126.

person's actions and commitment can be measured from the outside in chronological time: for instance, I failed my driving test in 1995, and I promised to marry my (then) boyfriend in 1998. But when a person weaves her own life together in a self-narrative, events and actions no longer follow the chronological sequence: It seems a long time ago now that I made that promise to that man, but I feel the shame of failing the test as if it had been yesterday.

How, then, does narrative relate to time?

In Ricoeur's words, there is a correlation 'between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience'.⁶⁷ He says that 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence'.⁶⁸

To show how different levels of temporality come into being, Ricoeur defines three kinds of narrative activity: *mimesis*₁ (prefiguration), *mimesis*₂ (configuration) and *mimesis*₃ (refiguration). As I shall explain, all of these three kinds of *mimesis* are involved in the weaving of a self-narrative.

Of the three kinds of *mimesis*, *mimesis*₂ provides the central concept. The composition of the plot is the main instrument in the building of narrative. The narrator chooses and orders events and actions and puts them into a time frame.⁶⁹ During plotting, she imitates and modifies these events and actions, using existing conceptions. The inspiration for the organization of events can vary – their choice and sequence can be driven by the character(p) of the protagonist, or it can follow a pattern which is embedded in the society's culture. For instance, the plot of Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*⁷⁰ is mainly structured by the psychological development of Isabel Archer, whereas Emile Zola's *Germinal*⁷¹ is built on the awareness of social problems in the nineteenth century.

In his definition of *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂ and *mimesis*₃, Ricoeur shows that emplotment (the process of selecting and ordering imitated actions) mediates between practical human experience and the application of narrative to human life. This is especially important for the configuration of a self-narrative: understanding a fictional narrative gives a person the opportunity to gain new insights into the world she lives in.

⁶⁷ Ricoeur 1984, 52.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur 1984, 52.

⁶⁹ Ricoeur 1984, 33.

⁷⁰ James 2009.

⁷¹ Zola 2008.

Ricoeur analyses the competences a person needs to have in order to participate in a narrative on these levels.⁷² To make the point clearer, I shall distinguish between three different roles here: The fiction reader, the fiction writer and the self-narrator. After a brief explanation of *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂ and *mimesis*₃, I shall summarize the specific activities required for each of these roles.

*Mimesis*₁

*Mimesis*₁ is the activity of understanding the world of action and its structures. In order to be able to compose or understand a plot, a person needs to be familiar with the symbolic, temporal and structural characteristics of action.

Regarding the symbolic characteristics of *mimesis*₁, a person must be able to distinguish action from mere physical movement. This entails identifying the agent and recognizing the agent's motives and social situation.⁷³ Many actions can be understood because they follow a symbolic convention that is specifically designed and acknowledged for the context in which the actions are performed. For instance, raising one's arm means voting for something in an assembly, but in a busy street it means hailing a taxi. Thus, the use of symbols makes an action readable to those who belong to a society in which these symbols have a commonly acknowledged meaning. The same applies to the symbols which represent social or ethical norms: a debutante curtsies when being presented to the Queen as an acknowledgment of the Queen's royal status, and in the nineteenth century it was customary for gentlemen to raise their hats to acquaintances in the streets as a mark of respect.

The second area we must be familiar with to understand a plot is the changeability of time as we experience it. The way we perceive the temporal properties of action is determined by the fact that we notice time differently when we are preoccupied with doing something. Past events and future plans are drawn into the experienced present when we are engaged with an action. Ricoeur adopts Heidegger's term 'within-time-ness' ('*Innerzeitigkeit*') for the time in which we ordinarily act.⁷⁴

⁷² At this point of his inquiry, Ricoeur does not distinguish between the competences needed by an author of literary fiction, a reader of literary fiction, or a person in the normal process of building a self-narrative.

⁷³ Ricoeur 1984, 55.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur 1984, 61.

Finally, we must know about the literary structures in which a plot is typically represented. In addition to the practical understanding of action and symbols, the author or reader needs to understand the rules of composition that enable the ordering of events into ‘the total action constitutive of the whole story’.⁷⁵ These rules of composition form part of the society’s cultural background. As Ricoeur puts it, ‘To understand a story is to understand both the language of “doing something” and the cultural tradition from which proceeds the typology of plots’.⁷⁶ He says that ‘knowing how to do something constitutes a ‘repertory’ common to the writer and the reader’.⁷⁷ The most widely used convention is that of leaving out events which have no relevance for the story. If it is not important for the work of fiction that a character eats, drinks, or uses the toilet, the writer does not describe these actions, and the reader assumes that they happen in the background.

The choice of subject also depends on a common cultural background of the writer and the reader. All societies have treasure-troves of orally transmitted myths and stories which are about gods, spirits, heroes and victims who behave in ways which are typical for a specific culture. For instance, many communities in the South Sea Islands have traditional mythical tales which deal with the dead, and the importance of preserving their honour and keeping in contact with them.

All of these pre-narrative structures (symbols, temporal experience, and the organization of action and plot,) give human life the quality of a story not yet told – the meaning has yet to be drawn from all of these distinct elements by weaving them into a story. Understanding pre-narrative structures also encourages the creation of new fictional narratives and helps to understand the ones already told. Literature would not be comprehensible if it did not make use of existing figures of human action.⁷⁸ How could we understand the tale of Cinderella if we did not know that sweeping the chimney is seen as low and dirty work, and that marrying a prince is considered the height of social climbing?

⁷⁵ Ricoeur 1984, 56.

⁷⁶ Ricoeur 1984, 57.

⁷⁷ Ricoeur 1991b, 141.

⁷⁸ Ricoeur 1984, 64.

Mimesis₂

Mimesis₂ is the activity of configuring a plot into a narrative. It is the central part of two processes: the weaving of a person's self-narrative, and the creation of a fictional narrative.⁷⁹ Building on the pre-narrative structures of mimesis₁, mimesis₂ organizes events into a narrative whole. In order to achieve this, the configuration has to mediate between different elements of the narrative. This works in three steps: unifying separate events into a story, providing them with relationships, and ordering the events over time.

The first step is to find connections between the individual events of the story and the story as a whole. This can be viewed from two angles: as a unifying operation, when events are knit together into a story, or as an abstraction, when the story as whole is derived from a number of separate events.⁸⁰ The mediation consists of the struggle between these two reciprocal relations: the influence of events on the story as a whole, and the influence of the story idea on the treatment of the events. As a result of this mediation, a configuration is created out of simple succession.

For the second step of mediation it is necessary to find the most important factors of the story, and to create or identify relations between them. These factors can be agents, sufferers, goals, means, social interactions, external events, or turns of fortune.

The third step of plot mediation is to order the events of the story over narrative time. Two dimensions of narrative time are combined: the chronological time slices in which single episodes take place are consolidated into a time sequence which gives sense to the story as a whole. This process can include conflation or extension of the time intervals and leaps between different points of chronological time. There is an additional requirement for the configuration of narrative time: a reader follows a story in expectation of an ending. The ending of the story needs to establish a point of view that makes all of these time configurations acceptable to the reader in retrospect.⁸¹

In addition to these three functions of mediation, plotting also has to make the connection between the theme and the representation intelligible to the reader. The story

⁷⁹ It also comes into play with the creation of non-fictional narratives, for instance of historical novels, biographies, or autobiographies. The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is, however, not part of this work.

⁸⁰ Ricoeur 1984, 65.

⁸¹ Ricoeur 1984, 67.

becomes understandable to the reader because she is able to apply the schemata which are constituted in the cultural tradition of her society. For example, if the narrative starts with the words ‘Once upon a time ...’ the reader knows that she can expect a fairy tale with typical elements such as stereotyped characters, repetitions, and a moral lesson. These schemata themselves are constantly subject to gradual updates when cultural concepts change over time.⁸²

The factors which define *mimesis*₂ are not only relevant to the plotting of fiction. They also come into play during the emplotment of a person’s self-narrative which extracts a personal configuration from a succession of life events, as I shall show in the section ‘Emplotment and One’s Own Story’.

*Mimesis*₃

*Mimesis*₃ is the activity of the reader who creates her own version of the fictional story by reading it. The reader follows the set of instructions given by the text and applies them to the story according to her own understanding and experience of the world. This is possible because the reader recognizes rules and paradigms which are known to her from *mimesis*₁. Based on these, she is able to fill the lacunae of the story, and finish the configuration of the story in her own way. Thus, she completes the plotting process the author set up in *mimesis*₂.⁸³

*Mimesis*₃ finally applies the narratives which were plotted in *mimesis*₂ to the time of action and suffering,⁸⁴ providing an ‘intersection of the world of a text and the world of a reader’.⁸⁵ The reader engages with the fictional narrative and the character(f) on the basis of her own knowledge and experience.

Actualizing the story by following it is, however, not the only thing the reader does. When a reader engages with a work of fiction, she relinquishes the cares of her daily life, her self, and commits herself to the role of the reader as suggested by the text. She appropriates the text in the sense of letting her ego go and opening herself to the revelatory powers of the text. Hence, the reader is able to overcome ‘what could be

⁸² Ricoeur 1984, 68.

⁸³ Ricoeur 1984, 76.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur differentiates between action and suffering: an agent is an active participant in an action, a sufferer is a passive participant in an action. A character(f) can be an actor or a sufferer in a fictional story, and be understood by the reader, based on her own experience. A self-narrator can be an actor or a sufferer in her self-narrative.

⁸⁵ Ricoeur 1984, 71.

called ‘the narcissism of the reader’: to find only oneself in a text, to impose and rediscover oneself.’⁸⁶ He draws a parallel here between the Freudian effect of self-analysis and the relinquishing of the reader’s ego in a fictional text.

By entering the realm of a fictional world, the reader gains a new perspective on the world, which enables her to perceive situations through other eyes, and subsequently to reflect on her own life. I shall discuss this process in detail in section 7.2.

The circle of mimesis

Within the threefold mimesis, mimesis₂ is the main force which is responsible for the building of narratives. Mimesis₂, the process of emplotment, ‘opens up the kingdom of the as if’,⁸⁷ and in mimesis₃, the reader creates her own rendering of the story, with the help of the pre-understanding gathered in mimesis₁. What does this mean in connection with one’s own life story? A fictional story is plotted by the author. A life story is a narrative which is derived from the events of a person’s own life. How do these two kinds of story relate to each other? Ricoeur claims that we continually weave the story of our lives into a self-narrative of which we are the co-authors regarding its meaning.⁸⁸ In the process of doing this, the three levels of mimesis form an ongoing cycle, assuring the continuity between the potential story and the actual story for which a person feels responsible.⁸⁹

The following matrix gives a brief overview of the involvement of the fiction writer, the fiction reader and the self-narrator in the activities mimesis₁, mimesis₂ and mimesis₃:

Level / Activity	Fiction Writer	Fiction Reader	Self-Narrator
Mimesis ₁	learning about action	learning about action	learning about action
Mimesis ₂	plotting fiction	N/A	plotting varieties of self-narrative
Mimesis ₃	N/A	refiguring fiction	refiguring self-narrative

Figure 1: Three levels of mimesis

⁸⁶ Ricoeur 1991a, 95.

⁸⁷ Ricoeur 1984, 64.

⁸⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 162.

⁸⁹ Ricoeur 1984, 75.

In the matrix, there is an arrow from the ‘refiguring fiction’ activity of the fiction reader to the ‘plotting varieties of self-narrative’ activity of the self-narrator. This connection between these two activities is the main topic of my own account, outlined in part III. I am going to claim that the fiction reader’s reading experience can – under certain conditions – influence her self-narrative.

But first, in the next section, I shall explore the general concept of the self-narrator.

1.8 Emplotment and One’s Own Story

In Ricoeur’s model, a person’s narrative identity relies on two processes: emplotment and the personalization of the plot.

In the previous section, I discussed Ricoeur’s definition of plot as the organization of events and actions which are included in the story. What does this mean regarding our own life, and our self-narrative? When things happen to us, we need to make sense of them; we feel the urge to link them to possible causes, and to anticipate possible developments. However, our affairs often do not work out as planned or expected. As a result, we have to re-assess the value and the importance of past events to accommodate new developments. For instance, if I buy a valuable-looking antique gold ring at a jumble sale for a good price, I will afterwards proudly recall how – over time – I built up the expertise to recognize the value of this ring. When I later show the ring to an acclaimed expert, and he proves to me that the ring is a cheap forgery, I will re-organize my self-narrative to assemble evidence of how I have often been too gullible in the past, and how people have warned me about that.

Concordance and discordance

Ricoeur claims that maintaining the connectedness of life as we experience it is an on-going project that is configured by opposing forces. Our desire for an ordering principle (concordance) of the events in our life is confronted with the reversals of fortune that threaten to transform the ordering principle we have previously accepted (discordance). The resulting mediation takes place in the form of a narrative where the heterogeneous elements of our life are merged to form a consistent story: the concordant elements of

the story have to be conciliated with the discordant elements. Ricoeur calls this process ‘discordant concordance’.⁹⁰ Emplotment involves mediation on different levels: multiple events have to be integrated into the temporal unity of the story; intentions, actions, and causes have to be interpreted and integrated into the narrative flow; and the chronological order of the events and the order in which they are to be told have to be balanced against each other. This does not imply, however, that the resulting narrative forms an objective account of things that happened; it accommodates the narrator’s needs within the given contingencies of her life.⁹¹ We plot our self-narrative to make sense to our self. Thus, we become both co-author and reflexive character(f) of our own story.

Emplotment in fiction

Ricoeur draws a parallel between self-narrative and fiction reading: he says that when we engage with a story that links a character(f) to a plot, the events in that story cannot be viewed as impersonal because one invariably sees them as relevant for that character(f).⁹² Emplotment does not only order the elements of the story, but it also attributes actions to the character(f), thus giving her a role in the story that may be active or passive. Ricoeur says that we understand the relation between the character(f) and the story told because we possess a ‘narrative intelligence’, a practical intelligence based on the stories that are intrinsic to our culture. By applying narrative intelligence to the story told, we attribute possible, actual, or completed actions to an agent who plays a role in the story.⁹³ Thus, a variety of different roles can be constructed. Ricoeur distinguishes between two extremes, the role of the agent who initiates a process of change or conservation, and the role of the sufferer who is affected by this process. In a complete narrative, action is interaction between different characters(f), and interaction is a rivalry between different projects of the characters(f) which might in turn oppose or promote each other.⁹⁴ The basic moral problem told in the narrative is based on the appreciation of the dissymmetry between the role of the agent and the role of the sufferer, and this moral problem drives the action.

⁹⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 141.

⁹¹ Ricoeur does not introduce this issue at this point, but takes it up later, to be discussed in section 2.4.

⁹² Ricoeur 1992, 142.

⁹³ Ricoeur 1992, 144.

⁹⁴ Ricoeur 1992, 145.

In a work of fiction, the author and the readers have a common understanding of how a story develops: the connection between action and character(f) causes an on-going conflict that is internal to the character(f). The character(f), searching for concordance, draws her sense of herself as a singular person from the unity of her life as she perceives it. When unexpected events happen, this unity is in danger of being disrupted. In order to balance the impact of such intrusions, she has to integrate these events into the history of her life, thus changing contingencies into facts in her story. Ricoeur says that the identity of the ‘emplotted’ character(f) can only be explained in relation to this dialectic:⁹⁵ the construction of the narrative constructs the identity of the character(f). Here is an example from literature: in *The End of the Affair*, Sarah holds on to a shaky concordance in the beginning. She is true to her passionate nature by having an affair with the man she loves, but she still feels guilty about betraying her husband. Then a bomb falls, and she fears her lover has been killed. This leads her to make a promise to God that does not only contradict her inclinations, but forces her to change her life completely. The effects of the bomb have created discordance in her narrative identity.

How does the principle of emplotment apply to self-narrative?

Ricoeur says that the plotting our self-narrative is similar to plotting a fictional narrative. Self-narrative inverts the effect that contingency has in real life: an event that might have happened differently, or not at all, assumes the nature of a necessity. It ceases to be a random occurrence as soon as it is reviewed in retrospect, after it has been transfigured into a given event that fits in with the story.⁹⁶ In real life, a person is pressed to make decisions about her plans and her acceptance of obligations when unexpected events upset the planned course of her life. When such conflicts between anticipated events and real events occur, this can lead to a dialectic of the character(p) (idem) and self-constancy (the ipse). If, for instance, I am offered the job of my dreams, but find that this would prevent me from caring for an aged relative for which I pledged myself, my promise and my urge for self-realization create a conflict which can only be resolved by re-ordering my self-narrative. I need to re-evaluate the weight of my original promise in retrospect, making it either more or less binding, and I need to re-tell

⁹⁵ Ricoeur 1992, 147.

⁹⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 142.

the story of my travel towards self-realization, as well as re-order my plans for the future. In this way, I have to refigure my whole self-narrative, as it presents itself to me now.

There are, of course, also other differences between plotting our self-narrative and plotting a fictional narrative. We can stop weaving the fictional narrative whenever we want, leaving the character(f) in their current dilemma until we choose to resume our work. In our daily encounters with the world and our social nexus, however, we need to regain our equilibrium quickly in the event of disruptions if we want to keep on functioning on an acceptable level. This means that in the event of severe conflicts, we often find it necessary to re-tell or re-order our own story in order to maintain a sense of self-unity. However, as Ricoeur says, the parallels between engaging with fiction-plotting and self-narrating are impressive.

The help of fiction for self-narrative

Our self-narrative does not fall into a clear pattern automatically; on the contrary, it undergoes a variety of imaginative variations that we try out in the process of re-interpreting our own life history. During this process, different scenarios are put to the test. Ricoeur points out that fiction provides a vast treasure trove of stories that enables the author/hero of a self-narrative to imaginatively try out possible courses of action: actions which are in line with stability of character(p), actions which are in line with self-constancy, and any number of variations between these extreme poles.⁹⁷ The realist novel, for instance, typically explores the intermediary area of variations: the character(f) is transformed by the crises of the plot she goes through, and at the end her aims and values are often quite different from what they were at the beginning of the story, but her character(p) remains recognizable throughout the story. In Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*⁹⁸, for example, the convict Magwitch is a violent man who undergoes a change of character(p) when young Pip helps him escape, and Magwitch promises to make a gentleman of Pip. Throughout his life in the colonies, Magwitch earns his income honourably, and he pays for Pip's education. On the one hand, the change from criminal to honest business man that goes hand in hand with his promise-

⁹⁷ The careful reader will notice that I do not list the case where idem and ipse overlap completely, although this can happen in real life. I hold that it does not happen in fiction: it would be too boring to read about.

⁹⁸ Dickens 2008a.

keeping is surprising. On the other hand, we recognize the singleness of purpose that was so remarkable about Magwitch from the start.

In contrast to the classic mode of fiction-writing, an extreme pole of possible variations is represented by novels that make the plot dependent on the character(f)'s character(p), as for instance stream-of-consciousness novels. Here, the character(f) escapes 'the control of its plot and of its ordering principle'.⁹⁹ In some cases, the character(f) herself appears to lose her identity in the text. Examples of this are Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* or Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. We appear to see through the protagonist's mind, and notice her peculiarities of perception, but she herself remains nebulous, unreachable. Ricoeur calls this style of writing 'exposing selfhood by taking away the support of sameness'.¹⁰⁰ For him, the erosion of story-paradigms (like plot, hero, anti-hero, etc.) goes hand in hand with a loss of narrative configuration that gives us a text that does not actually tell a story because there is no recognizable character(f) to link it to. In some cases, fiction reads like an essay as it does not have an identifiable protagonist. Here, Ricoeur says, the self has lost the support of sameness – it has lost its anchor to the world.

Now we come to the important question: how do these different ways of story-telling feature in the imaginative variations that Ricoeur sees as the underlying exercise for the configuration of a self-narrative? For Ricoeur, the answer is clear: literary fiction provides a selective imitation of actions and life, built on a narrative pre-understanding that is common to all humans, thus providing possible models for the reader's own life story. Hence, it is an important point for Ricoeur that literary fiction deals with life as it is experienced in the world through the body because imaginative variations need the 'anchor' of the body to the world in order to be familiar with embodied experiences.¹⁰¹

What is the link between action and narrative?

So far, I have shown Ricoeur's claim that a person attributes her own actions to herself because she possesses the two important skills that are necessary for this: she has the capacity to act, and she has the ability to ascribe actions to herself. An important part of his model still needs to be clarified: in which ways can narrative help us to find out

⁹⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 149.

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur 1992, 150.

whether a person can be seen as morally responsible for her own actions?¹⁰² To prepare for this investigation, we need to explore the relation between action and narrative.

Ricoeur re-examines the concept of action in two steps. First, he investigates how narrative influences the way we see ourselves and our actions, then he checks the ethical implications of the narrative function.

For his first step, he organizes types of activities (or ‘praxis units’) into a hierarchy. He distinguishes two different types of actions: actions which require practices, and actions which do not. Basic actions are performed instinctively (for instance gestures or postures) and do not have to be learned explicitly – all other actions require practices. To master a practice, an agent needs to be trained, based on a particular tradition (specialist knowledge).¹⁰³ Ricoeur says that a definition of actions without the concept of practices would leave a gap in the configuration of a narrative. Even if we link intentions, causes, and effects in a chain that explains all observable details (as in G. E. M. Anscombe’s man at the pump¹⁰⁴), the missing aspect is the classification of actions in terms of professions, arts, religious activities or games (in Anscombe’s example, if we assume that the man was poisoning the water intentionally, the missing aspect would be the man’s indoctrination as a religious fanatic). Practices can be seen as second-order units:¹⁰⁵ for instance, a profession like farming entails subordinate activities like feeding the poultry or starting a tractor, which are not practices in themselves. Taken out of context, the action of throwing seeds on to the ground does not make sense, but in the context of a farmer feeding free-range chickens it has a meaning. The rule that throwing seeds into a chicken yard ‘counts’ as feeding chickens, and thus, an act of farming, is an example of what Ricoeur calls a ‘constitutive rule’ of a practice: ‘The rule, all by itself, gives the gesture its meaning’¹⁰⁶.

In addition to that, a constitutive rule stresses the interactive nature of most practices. Practices typically involve actions of others, which makes them part of a larger social interaction. If the interaction is external, it can take the form of a conflict, or a collaboration, or a competition. For a chicken farmer, for instance, there could be a

¹⁰² Ricoeur 1992, 152.

¹⁰³ Ricoeur 1992, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Anscombe 2000, 37: A man is pumping water, making a pleasant clinking noise, replenishing the water tank of a house, knowing that the water is poisoned, wanting to get rid of the inhabitants because they offend his religious persuasion. Anscombe asks: ‘Is there any description which is *the* description of an intentional action, given that an intentional action occurs?’.

¹⁰⁵ Ricoeur 1992, 153.

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 154.

fight for big customers with other farmers, or a cooperation with others to buy commonly used machinery.

The interaction can also be internal, for instance in learning a profession. Usually, professions are taught from person to person, they are based on tradition, and they go through a process of innovation and adaptation.

Summing up his definition of practices, Ricoeur concludes that the organization of practices contributes to giving a pre-narrative quality to real life scenarios, already providing roles for the agent who performs these practices. Narrative gives ‘the polemical form of a competition of the narrative programs of different persons to the forms of human interaction that practices are based on.’¹⁰⁷ This means that the practices a person is involved in already form the grounds of her self-narrative.

1.9 Narrative Unity

In the previous section, we saw Ricoeur’s view that the roles we play in real life already have a pre-narrative structure. The next question is: how does my life become a unified story? To explore this, Ricoeur examines the relation between a person’s self-narrative and her overall project of existence. He defines ‘life plans’, a level above practices, as practical units that cover different areas of life, for instance family life, professional life, sports, or arts. Each of these life plans develops in an on-going interchange of values and weighing of possible choices.¹⁰⁸

Thus, the whole area of praxis is constituted by two different movements. From the bottom, basic actions and practices add complexity through the social interactions they involve. From the top, movable and elusive ideals and projects try to provide and enforce specifications on actions and practices. This double determination lends itself well to narrative configuration.

Narrative unity in fiction

Where the whole project of lived existence is concerned, Ricoeur uses the term ‘narrative unity of life’.¹⁰⁹ He says that the narrative unity of life is precarious, an

¹⁰⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 157.

¹⁰⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 158.

¹⁰⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 158.

‘unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience’.¹¹⁰ As literary fiction provides examples of possible life plans, he argues, it provides good material for thought experiments regarding the reader’s own life. In literary fiction, it is easier to recognize the connection between action and agent than in real life, and literary fiction also provides ‘an immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations’.¹¹¹ He sees reading as a struggle between what he calls the ‘strategy of seduction’ followed by the author, and the ‘strategy of suspicion’ pursued by the reader who thus adds meaning to the text.¹¹² The reading process is based on a ‘pact of trust’¹¹³ between the author and the reader: engaging with a work of fiction, the reader grants the author the right to show the character(f)’s mind from the inside, and to make an assessment of this character(f) and the actions and events in the work. During the reader’s assessment of the character(f), the conflict between the author’s strategy of seduction and the reader’s strategy of suspicion comes into play.

The real author transforms herself into the **implied author**, and in this role, she tempts the reader to adopt the specific values which underlie the presentation of the fictional text.¹¹⁴ The reader, on the other hand, refigures the fictional story during the reading process, fills the gaps with her own knowledge of the world, and decides whether the characters(f) and the fictional events are compatible with her own expectations. As Ricoeur says, the modification of the reader’s expectations ‘consists in traveling the length of the text, in allowing all the modifications to “sink” into memory, while compacting them, and in opening ourselves up to new expectations entailing new modifications’.¹¹⁵ Thus, the reader creates her own fictional world and her own understanding of the character(f)’s life plan.

Reading fiction can only have a positive influence on the reader’s narrative unity of life, however, if it eventually leads to self-examination and self-adaption.¹¹⁶ There will be a full discussion of this point in Part III, where I present my own account of fiction reading in relation to narrative identity.

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 162.

¹¹¹ Ricoeur 1992, 159.

¹¹² Ricoeur 1992, 159.

¹¹³ Ricoeur 1988, 161.

¹¹⁴ Ricoeur 1991d, 391.

¹¹⁵ Ricoeur 1988, 168.

¹¹⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 159.

Self-narrative and authorship

An objection to the concept of narrative unity is that, obviously, we are not literally authors of our own lives.¹¹⁷ Our self-narrative is constrained by many things over which we have little or no influence, such as our genetic code, our family, the date and time of our birth, illnesses, or natural catastrophes.¹¹⁸ Ricoeur defuses this criticism by saying that we have three roles regarding the narrative of our own lives: we are narrator, protagonist, and co-author as to its meaning. The role of the co-author is, in the case of self-narrative, unstable because we can only be the weaker partner regarding the contingencies of our lives. Our life history is influenced by external events, and it is entwined in the life histories of others. Ricoeur claims that the important part of this co-authoring with respect to our own life-narrative is our appropriation of externally induced life changes, in the sense of making them our own, and that this appropriation helps to maintain a narrative unity.¹¹⁹ At this point, there is a gap in the analogy of self-narrative with fiction: regarding authorship, self-narrative can be better compared with historical fiction. The battles that Napoleon fought can be verified by so many sources that they cannot be ignored by a reasonably rational person, but the motivations and feelings of Napoleon regarding these battles can be interpreted in different ways. The removal of my wisdom teeth while I was living in Berlin is well documented in the records of my dentist and of my health insurance company, and remembered by my friends whom I told about this, but my stance towards this operation is open to interpretation. Was I brave, indifferent, or a coward when I decided to have this done? Different views on this are possible.

How can there be a unity of life without an ending?

Another difficulty regards the notions of beginning and end in connection with a self-narrative. In fiction, the beginning and the end of a story are usually clearly defined (unless we have a capricious author who likes to play games with her readers), and in

¹¹⁷ As, for instance, Peter Goldie points out, we are authors of the way we present our lives to ourselves, not authors of the represented life itself, see Goldie 2012, 162.

¹¹⁸ This will be discussed in more detail in section 2.4. Here, I only outline the arguments given by Ricoeur himself.

¹¹⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 162.

many cases a piece of fiction ends with the death of its main protagonist.¹²⁰ How can we tell a unified story of our own life, or aim for a successful life, when we do not know (and most of us will never know) how and when it is going to end? It is also problematic to define a starting point for our self-narrative. If we pick the time of our conception (as Laurence Sterne does in *Tristram Shandy*¹²¹), there are no memories of our own that we can build our story on, and the memories of our early childhood are bound to be hazy.

Ricoeur argues that these objections against the notion that a person can represent her own life as a narrative to herself can only apply if you have a naive conception of the way we experience our lives. In fact, he says, these arguments themselves give strong evidence that life is ‘an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience’¹²² which needs the application of fiction to re-organize past events in retrospect, and to adjust the story our life appears to have followed. We experience narrative closure regarding the completion of actions and life plans that we initiated, and use fiction in addition to our own experience to plan new strands of our life. Even regarding the prospect of death, fiction can help by providing an ‘apprenticeship of dying’¹²³ to the reader which makes her familiar with behaviour patterns she can then apply to the prospects of her own life. Thus, literary narrative and life histories can complement each other. As Ricoeur says, ‘narrative is part of life before being exiled from life in writing; it returns to life along the multiple paths of appropriation’.¹²⁴ By imagining the progress and the ending of our life in the future, we can make these envisioned developments part of our self-narrative, thus shaping a unity of life.

1.10 Narrative Identity and Ethics

In the previous section, I discussed Ricoeur’s claim that humans are able to view their lives not only in narrative form, but even as a unified narrative. But how is such a narrative connected to the ipse, the lived self? Ricoeur says that we need to investigate

¹²⁰ Sometimes, the reader gets the impression that the author chose this ending to get rid of the protagonist, not knowing what else to do with him, like in the ironic ending of the first version of ‘Der grüne Heinrich’ by Gottfried Keller: ‘und es ist auf seinem Grab ein recht frisches und grünes Gras gewachsen’ (‘and the grass on his grave grew fresh and green’, my own translation).

¹²¹ Sterne 1967, 35.

¹²² Ricoeur 1992, 162.

¹²³ Ricoeur 1992, 162.

¹²⁴ Ricoeur 1993, 163.

what humans want, and he claims that a person's ethical aims are linked to her life narrative, thus completing the unification.

He picks up his earlier statement that when the self appropriates an action to herself as the agent, she also imputes its moral consequences to herself. What part does self-narrative play within the process of moral self-assessment and moral imputation, and how does moral assessment of actions unfold?

What is good for us?

Ricoeur develops his argument from Aristotle's claim that a person always aims at a 'good life', what she perceives to be a full life. Following Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that regarding ethics, an individual cannot be separated from the roles she plays in the society of others,¹²⁵ Ricoeur claims that the ethical intention of a human life consists in '*aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions*'.¹²⁶

The starting point for Ricoeur's analysis is the ethical quality of action. As we saw in the previous section, Ricoeur categorizes action into the hierarchy of basic actions, practices and life plans. Practices group basic actions together, dependent on the role an individual has in society, and each of these role-based practices develops special virtues, called 'standards of excellence' by MacIntyre.¹²⁷ These standards of excellence are subject to controversy and competition between the practitioners. This conflict is only possible, Ricoeur says, because the practitioners share a common culture, and these rules were originally developed and established on a social level.¹²⁸ The 'internal good' immanent to these practices evokes feelings of satisfaction in the practitioners who reflect on them, thus building a basis for self-esteem.¹²⁹

The next step on the hierarchy of action, the development of life plans, is achieved by the use of phronesis (practical intelligence): rendering distant ideals more precise and allowing us to decide how to prioritise them in practice. Human beings define life plans for themselves by adopting standards of excellence that have been defined for, and by, practices. Aiming to perform this task well leads to choices that are constantly challenged by experiences on the levels either of base actions or of practices.

¹²⁵ MacIntyre 2007, 206.

¹²⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 172.

¹²⁷ MacIntyre 1981, 31.

¹²⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 176.

¹²⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 177.

For instance, a man may decide that in order to live a fulfilled life, he needs to become a doctor and help the sick. But if it turns out that he faints at the sight of blood, he has to reconsider his choice of profession which was an important part of his life plan.

Ricoeur draws the connection between aiming at the good life and the narrative unity of a life by pointing out that the moral subject is the same as the subject to whom this life narrative assigns a narrative identity.¹³⁰ He agrees with MacIntyre's view that the unity of a single life is the unity of a narrative embodied in this life, and that this narrative gives the answer to the question 'what is good for me?'. The answer to the question 'what is good for man?' contains the common denominator of all the answers to the question 'what is good for me?'.¹³¹

Ethical aims and fiction reading

The importance of our ethical aims becomes apparent when we read a fictional narrative: we invariably engage in evaluating the actions and characters in the story, approving or disapproving of them from an ethical point of view. Fiction provides us with a variety of thought experiments regarding possible actions and interactions. We judge these actions to be good or bad by applying standards to them. These standards represent the ethical aims that we have integrated into our own self-narrative. By applying our ethical aims and our practices to the action models outlined in fictional narratives, we come across warnings or incentives that assist us in examining our own aims and life plans. Thus, reading fiction can help us to form a unified self-narrative, which can be a good thing. However, fiction reading can also have other effects, and a unified self-narrative needs to meet certain prerequisites to be a good thing. I shall discuss this in detail in the presentation of my own account in part III.

In this chapter, I showed how Ricoeur's account of narrative identity is based on his two-level view of personal identity: the objective (the *idem*) and the subjective (the *ipse*) are both necessary to represent a person, and these two views cannot be reduced to each other. The *idem* and the *ipse* are linked on various levels: in language, in action, and in self-ascription. These links are incorporated in our self-narrative, which has two main functions: it works as a practical identity which helps us to deal with the conflicts

¹³⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 178.

¹³¹ MacIntyre 1981, 218.

in our interaction with the world and our social nexus, and it provides our life with a sense of unity.

2 Ricoeur's model in relation to other accounts of personal identity

Ricoeur's account of narrative identity is one of many attempts to define personal identity over time. In this chapter, I shall give a brief overview of how Ricoeur's account of narrative identity relates to other accounts of personal identity. I shall not attempt to give a full overview of all accounts, but shall instead focus on the main differences between Ricoeur's model and the most relevant proponents of other models of personal identity.

In section 2.1 to 2.3, I shall explain Ricoeur's account against the background of non-narrative accounts of personal identity. My aim is to emphasize the difference of approach which sets Ricoeur's Narrative Identity Account apart from Bodily Continuity Accounts and Psychological Connectedness Accounts. Narrative Identity Accounts address different questions about a person's life than other accounts, and I show this by highlighting the special features of Ricoeur's model.

It is not in the scope of my work to defend Ricoeur's account of narrative identity against non-narrative accounts of personal identity. My comparison is designed to show that Ricoeur is investigating a different issue from the one addressed by these accounts.

My discussion will become more critical in section 2.4 where I defend Ricoeur's model against other Narrative Identity Accounts, explaining why I chose his account as a basis for my own research.

To outline the differences of approach between Ricoeur's account and other accounts of personal identity, I shall explore some critical points of Derek Parfit's account in the section about psychological connectedness accounts, and of Galen Strawson's account in the section about narrative identity accounts. I would like to stress that it is not my aim to produce decisive objections to these thinkers; my objective is to use their arguments to clarify Ricoeur's views.

An inquiry into personal identity usually starts with the determination of what a person is. However, I shall not go into a detailed discussion here, but will assume the generally

held view that a person is a being capable of self-reflective consciousness and agency.¹³²

The question of personal identity over time contains many puzzles. After the determination or assumption of what constitutes a person, most research into the persistence of person over time engages with the definition of numerical identity as a next step.¹³³ Numerical identity is the relation that holds between two entities when they are the self-same entity, that is, when the terms designating them have the same reference at all points in time and space. The relationship of numerical identity is reflexive, commutative and transitive. On this definition, identity claims must always be either true or false.

Trying to apply this definition to persons, some problems become apparent immediately. Persons change over time, both physically and psychologically, so that a person x at time t_n may look and act differently from person x at time t_{n+1} even though she claims to be the same person and bears the same name. If the time difference is big, for instance between the teenager x and the old-age pensioner x , it may be very difficult to find even resemblance, let alone qualitative identity. The properties of a person can change dramatically over time. Even if this can be traced back to gradual small alterations, the overall change can be so severe that an additional link seems to be necessary, a bracket that links the different stages of a person's history.

Three different strands of research have been developed in quest of an explanation of personal identity over time: the bodily continuity accounts (**BCAs**), the psychological connectedness accounts (**PCAs**), and accounts of narrative identity (**NIAs**). I am going to present the main arguments of the most influential contemporary representatives for each of these strands and confront their claims briefly with Ricoeur's account.

2.1 Examples of personal identity in question

To outline the different approaches of accounts of personal identity over time (including Ricoeur's account), I am going to discuss how each of them would deal with the

¹³² See e.g. Shoemaker 2012, chapter 7; Korfmacher 2006, section 1b.

¹³³ see section 1.6, 'Identity as sameness over time'.

following four examples of ‘threatened’ personal identity (cases where the link between the various stages of a person’s history appears to be broken):

Case 1:

There is factual evidence (fingerprints and DNA found on the murder weapon) that I killed a man ten years ago, but I do not have any recollection of having done this. So I insist that I am innocent. Am I right?

Case 2:

I wake up in the body of a giant bug (like Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka’s short story *Metamorphosis*¹³⁴). Am I still myself?

Case 3:

I am going to be executed next week, but a friend of mine will create a complete clone of myself (body and the complete set of brain states at the time of cloning) just before the guards take me away. The clone will escape and live on. Should I be concerned about my execution?

Case 4:

My husband claims that I am now a completely different person from the woman he married, and consequently files for a divorce. Am I the woman whom he promised to love forever at our wedding?

2.2 *Bodily Continuity Accounts (BCAs)*

BCAs claim that where *x* is a person at time *t*₁, and *y* is a person at any time *t*_{*n*}, *y* is the same person as *x* **iff** *y*’s body is biologically continuous with *x*’s body. For these accounts, a person’s identity over time consists in the identity of her body.¹³⁵

Olson’s ‘Human Animal’ account is a currently popular variant of the BCA. Olson claims that people are human animals, that ‘each of us is numerically identical with an animal’.¹³⁶ Thus, he avoids the difficulty of defining what is to ‘be’ one’s

¹³⁴ Kafka 1983, 57.

¹³⁵ Olson 2010, chapter 7.

¹³⁶ Olson 2003, 318.

animal body: how do I experience my animal body as my own? Animalism does not give any explanation of how the physical properties of the animal body and the psychological properties of the person interact.

Olson focusses on a relatively easy question (is the animal body continuous?), while he does not attempt to tackle the hard part (what is a person?). As Olson says, ‘Animalism leaves the answer to the Personhood Question entirely open’.¹³⁷

If we want to answer the question: ‘what makes me as a person persist over time?’, BCAs only answer the second half of the question. BCAs presuppose that the prerequisites for being a person are met, without defining what these prerequisite might be. Hence, it is easy for the proponents of these accounts to find clear-cut solutions to the four difficult cases of personal identity over time listed in section 2.1.

In case 1, the fingerprints and the DNA on the murder weapon belong to my body. Under the assumption that the combination of fingerprints and DNA uniquely identifies a body, and that my body has persisted over time, I am the same person as the person who killed the man ten years ago, and hence, I am guilty.

As a giant bug has a different body than a human being, and the change of body happened over night, it is obvious that my body change could not have been biologically continuous. Thus, in case 2, BCAs would say that I am no longer the same person, as I am no longer biologically identical with the same animal.

A similar logic applies to case 3. If my body dies, then I die, because I am identical with my body. If a copy of my body is made, this has no influence on my identity or my survival – the new body will be a different animal.

Under the assumption that I have not mysteriously switched bodies since my marriage, the answer in case 4 is yes, I am still the same person my husband has pledged to love forever, even though I may seem unrecognizable to him.

A possible link between Ricoeur’s account and BCAs is the importance that both kinds of account place on embodiment, but apart from that Ricoeur does not think that they have much in common. Ricoeur has doubts about the application of identification criteria in general. In his view, the body belongs to the self through the process of attestation,¹³⁸ and this process does not involve making truth-claims that can be proved.¹³⁹ Ricoeur does not investigate any particular BCA models, but he criticizes

¹³⁷ Olson 2010, chapter 7.

¹³⁸ See section 1.4.

¹³⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 129.

the assumption behind them. He describes them as ‘governed by the permanence of an organization observable from outside’.¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur investigates the relationship between the lived self and the object world, and he views BCAs as interested only in persons as living objects.

As BCAs do not include any explanation of what it is to be a person, Ricoeur does not consider them as helpful accounts of personal identity. He thinks that the BCAs’ focus on finding criteria for identification proofs prevents them from seeing a human being as a whole. For Ricoeur, the ethical responsibility of a person for her actions is an important aspect of personal identity, and this inner view (‘I affirm my own identity’) is not considered by BCAs. Thus, Ricoeur argues that an account of numerical identity needs to be extended by an investigation into how the lived self of a person persists over time.¹⁴¹

We shall now look at Psychological Connectedness accounts. Let us see how they differ from Ricoeur’s model of narrative identity.

2.3 *Psychological Connectedness Accounts (PCAs)*

2.3.1 Overview

Psychological Connectedness Accounts (PCAs) define criteria for the persistence of a person over time that consider the continuity of psychological states. They claim that where x at time t_1 and y at any time t_n are persons, y is the same person as x iff y ’s psychological states are continuous with x ’s psychological states, provided that these psychological states have developed from one another either directly (psychological connectedness), or through overlapping chains of direct psychological connections (psychological continuity).

These accounts have evolved from John Locke’s claim that personal identity entails the consciousness (through memory) of having existed as the same being at different times.¹⁴² Psychological connectedness accounts have standardly focussed on

¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur 1992, 126.

¹⁴¹ Ricoeur 1992, 116.

¹⁴² ‘Personal identity. This being premised, to find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; — which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places’, Locke 1999, Book II Chapter XXVII section 9.

the existence of memories, and I am going to assume that standard version here. One objection against this criterion of psychological connectedness has been raised: if the concept of our memory entails that I can only recall my own actions and experiences, then the continuity of memory presupposes personal identity.

To cope with this problem, philosophers defined the term ‘quasi-memory’ or ‘q-memory’: Having a quasi-memory of a past experience entails that I seem to remember having that experience, that somebody had this experience, and that my apparent memory is causally dependent on that past experience in the right kind of way.¹⁴³ Under these conditions, psychological connectedness is preserved. Ordinary memories can thus be understood as a subclass of quasi-memories. If we assume that I can also have a q-memory of an event that was actually performed by a different person, the continuity of memory does not presuppose personal identity.

Derek Parfit’s view is a close cousin to PCAs that has raised much controversy. For him, all facts about persons and the persistence of persons over time can be reduced to more particular facts about brains, bodies, and a relation of mental and physical events (Relation R).¹⁴⁴ Relation R consists in psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, with the right kind of cause.¹⁴⁵

Parfit claims that there is psychological continuity iff there are overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness. A person *x* at time *t*₁ is psychologically continuous with a person *y* at time *t*₂ only if this continuity has the right kind of cause, and if it has not taken a branching form, i.e. if there is only one person at time *t*₂ who is psychologically continuous with person *x* at time *t*₁.¹⁴⁶

He claims that although our existence involves the existence of our brains and bodies as well as our actions and our thoughts, our persistence over time just involves Relation R. However, Parfit does not take persistence in this sense to constitute continuing personal identity. His most provocative statement is ‘Personal identity is not what matters’.¹⁴⁷ The only thing that does matter, to him, is qualitative survival represented by psychological states maintained in Relation R.

¹⁴³ Parfit 1987, 220. In Parfit’s view, long-term memories are caused by memory-traces. If memory-traces can be copied from the brain of person A to person B, Parfit claims, then B’s memories of A’s experiences would be causally dependent on A’s experiences in the right kind of way.

¹⁴⁴ Parfit 1987, 201-211.

¹⁴⁵ Parfit 1987, 262.

¹⁴⁶ Parfit 1987, 207.

¹⁴⁷ Parfit 1987, 217.

To illustrate his claim that Relation R is important, whereas the question of personal identity is empty, he compares a person to a club or a nation: A club exists for some time, following a set of rules, holding meetings. Then, it ceases to exist. A little later, some of its members may found a new club with the same name, setting up the same rules. Parfit says that in this case, there is no determinate answer to the question: ‘Is it the same club, or a new club?’. But this is not important, he claims. We are in possession of all the facts, and finding an answer to this question would not give us any additional information.¹⁴⁸

In his view, a similar situation arises if a person dies, and an exact replica of this person lives instead. As a proof that personal identity is not what matters, Parfit presents his thought experiment ‘Simple Teletransportation’.¹⁴⁹ In order to be teletransported to Mars, I have to press a green button that scans my blueprint and creates an exact replica of my body and my brain states on Mars, while simultaneously destroying my brain and body on Earth. I am informed about what is going to happen. Parfit argues that although I am intuitively afraid to die, the existence of my replica has the same quality as my ordinary survival. My replica is psychologically continuous with me as I will be when I press the button. She believes she is me. If – as Parfit claims – a person is nothing over and above psychological continuity, nothing is lost by my death if my replica is created as an immediate successor.

Parfit would find the following answers in the example cases from section 2.1:

In case 1, he would look for evidence / witnesses to establish whether there is psychological continuity between my person at the time of the murder I am accused of, and the person I am now. My current lack of memory that I committed the murder does not contradict Relation R – my brain states now might be psychologically connected to my brain states at some time between the murder and now, when I still remembered having committed it. If the conditions for relation R are fulfilled, I am wrong in proclaiming my innocence.

Case 2 is more difficult. In a sudden metamorphosis like this, Relation R would require that the brain states I had before the transformation should exist unchanged after the accomplished change. If a giant bug is conceivable, is it also conceivable that this giant bug is capable of producing psychological states that have the same structure and quality as the human psychological states I had before? Parfit is fond of science fiction

¹⁴⁸ Parfit 1987, 213.

¹⁴⁹ Parfit 1987, 200.

examples, so he could perhaps assume that the bug was created by aliens who were able to copy my previous brain to something that processes information in the same way, especially as my immediate memories appear to be intact. Otherwise the transformation of human brain states to a bug brain would have been like trying to run the newest Windows version on a 1980s Atari computer. Assuming that the bug's brain is able to process information in the same way as my previous human brain, Parfit would say that I survive because Relation R persists, and qualitative survival is the only thing that matters.

Case 3 represents a typical Parfit example. If my body and brain states are cloned before the execution, then Relation R continues, and I will still be there. So Parfit would say that I do not need to be concerned about my execution because the persistence of Relation R guarantees my survival.

Case 4 requires the same kind of investigation as Case 1. If the conditions for Relation R are given for me from the time when my husband married me and the time when he files for a divorce, then I am still the woman he married. If, on the other hand, I underwent a sudden psychological change (for instance caused by a bullet entering my brain, but not killing me), this would break Relation R, and in Parfit's view I would indeed not be the woman whom my husband married, and my husband could claim this as a reason for divorcing me.

Summing up, Parfit's two basic Reductionist claims are: 1) a person's identity over time just consists in the holding of some more particular facts, and 2) these facts can be explained in an impersonal way, without holding that the experiences in the person's life were had by this person, 'or even explicitly claiming that this person exists'.¹⁵⁰

The one point where Ricoeur agrees with Parfit is that trying to define truth criteria for personal identity would be a futile exercise. They arrive at this conclusion for completely different reasons, though: Parfit claims that only Relation R matters, and that the question about personal identity is empty. Ricoeur, on the other hand, holds that personal identity must be investigated both in terms of sameness and in terms of selfhood, but that truth conditions can only be applied on the level of sameness. Where sameness is concerned, identity is a result of comparison: the relation of object x to object y is determined by the definition of identity, thus either verifying or falsifying

¹⁵⁰ Parfit 1987, 210.

that x is identical to y. But, Ricoeur argues, whether a certain body or a certain set of memories belong to myself cannot be tested by the application of a criterion that leads to the result of either true or false.¹⁵¹ The characteristics of personal identity on the level of self come into being through attestation: I accept my memories, my actions and my body as my own.¹⁵²

As a result, Ricoeur rejects Parfit's Reductionism. The two main targets of his criticism are: 1) Parfit's statement that Relation R is the only thing that matters, 2) Parfit's claim that everything about a person's persistence over time can be described in an impersonal way, without referring to the notion of a self.

2.3.2 Reductionism and what really matters

According to Parfit, a person's existence consists in nothing but the existence of a brain and a body, and a sequence of interrelated physical and mental events. Ricoeur argues that this definition disregards the intuitive concept of 'mineness'. Although Parfit constantly uses personal pronouns like 'mine' or 'our' (see for example 'Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters'¹⁵³), he dismisses this concept as nothing more than a practical linguistic usage. He does not attach any importance to the process of self-ascription in a person's social relationships.

Ricoeur disagrees with Parfit's dismissal of mineness as nothing more than a linguistic custom. As Ricoeur points out, mineness is an important issue for a person in daily practical life as it generates a feeling of self-constitution. This is what our experience in daily life tells us: no matter whether something is a physical object, or a belief, or a personal attribute – it feels more valuable to us if we see it as 'mine'. An interesting and more recent expression of this is the 'Jesus and Mo' cartoon in which Mo and Jesus agree that if our beliefs are based on bullshit, then so are our identities. But, they say, even if our identities should be bullshit-based, they are still ours, and 'that's what makes them so precious'.¹⁵⁴

Another important point of Ricoeur's criticism of Parfit's view of a person is that Relation R does not account for the responsibility of a person as an agent, as

¹⁵¹ Ricoeur 1992, 129.

¹⁵² See section 1.4.

¹⁵³ Parfit 1987, 245.

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.jesusandmo.net/2007/08/07/core/>.

perceived by the person herself. Personal identity, Ricoeur claims, is important for persons regarding their own ethical behaviour. He says that when I ask the question ‘Who am I?’, I re-evaluate my personal values and my plans for the future and reflect on whether my feelings and my beliefs are compatible.

This view is shared by Kim Atkins (who supports Ricoeur’s view of narrative identity as a practical identity):¹⁵⁵ I am confronted with the question ‘Who am I?’ in situations of social conflict, so the resulting reflections form an on-going process throughout my life. Within my social nexus, I need to define who I am, regarding both my own conscience and my relationship to others. I understand myself better through the regard of others with whom I interact within a complex network of commitments. My identity has to be recovered from the different views of myself that I experience in the course of my social relations.

If I do not keep a promise I made, who is to be held responsible? This question can be asked from two sides: from the outside, from my social nexus, and from the inside, from my own conscience. In both cases, I would be in conflict because my actions do not match my obligations.¹⁵⁶ Thus, according to Atkins, the ethical aspect of selfhood is an essential component of personal identity.

Relation R consists of person stages at isolated points in time, linked by psychological continuity in a non-branching form. For Parfit, Relation R is the only thing that matters in survival. If this were the case, how could it be possible to impute responsibility for a promise that was given by a person stage at time t_0 to a person stage at any time t_n ?¹⁵⁷ Viewed from the outside, this does not present a problem, but Relation R does not explain why a person should be in an inner conflict if she does not keep her promise. The event-ontology of Relation R does not support the self-accountability of an agent for a promise made, or an action performed, in the past.

Hence, Ricoeur claims that Parfit does not ask the right kind of question when he investigates the conditions for survival. For Ricoeur, self-accountability is an important aspect of personal identity which cannot be reduced to anything else.

Parfit does integrate ethical considerations in his account, especially discussions about the rationality of self-interest. He says, however, that it is credible to be more interested in the quality of future experiences than in the question whose

¹⁵⁵ Atkins 2000, 341.

¹⁵⁶ Teichert 2004, 180.

¹⁵⁷ Teichert 2004, 181.

experiences they are going to be.¹⁵⁸ Regarding past acts and commitments, he holds that if the psychological connections between a criminal now and the same criminal at the time of her crime are weak, she is less culpable than she would be if they were strong, and a similar principle should be applied to commitments.¹⁵⁹ For Parfit, personal responsibility is proportional to psychological connectedness. As his approach does not consider self-attestation and self-constancy, it leaves out thoughts about **ethical subjectivity**.¹⁶⁰ Atkins criticizes this aspect of Parfit's account. She claims (in agreement with Ricoeur) that the requirements of daily life force us to be practical beings, and as such, we are less interested in the theoretical question 'is there a moral guide on how one should act?' than in the practical question 'how should I act?'.¹⁶¹ This is an important distinction because a cause that explains general ethical concerns from a third person point of view might not be sufficient to justify an action from my own point of view. For instance, in Grahame Greene's *Brighton Rock*, Ida urges Rose to abandon her husband Pinkie, who is a sociopath and a killer. Ida tells Rose that it is dangerous to stay with Pinkie, and that she should learn the difference between Right and Wrong. Here, Ida represents the ethical concern from a third person point of view that is grounded on the theoretical values of her society. But Rose, who accepts no other values than the ones derived from her own sufferings and passions, only distinguishes between her self-defined notions of Good and Evil. Having chosen Evil by choosing Pinkie, whom she loves, she is now convinced that sticking to him is the thing for her to do.¹⁶² For Rose, the all-important question is not the third person question: 'Is it wrong not to bring Pinkie to justice?' but her subjective question: 'Considering that we are both of us on the side of Evil, shall I not stay with him in spite of his faults?'. Her ethical subjectivity influences her actions more strongly than the theoretical ethical aims of her society. As this example illustrates, personal accountability cannot always be measured by psychological connectedness alone, as Parfit argues. His impersonal perspective does not capture the complete picture. Ethical subjectivity – as an additional parameter – gives additional insights into a person's choices and responsibilities.

¹⁵⁸ Parfit 1987, 346.

¹⁵⁹ Parfit 1987, 347.

¹⁶⁰ Ethical subjectivity is a person's ability to act according to her personal aims, preferences and values. This ability is shaped and developed in a person's interaction with her social nexus and its prevailing value system.

¹⁶¹ Atkins 2005, 354.

¹⁶² Greene 1970, 199.

The question whether we are right to be concerned about our own future is another problem on which Ricoeur and Parfit disagree. There are two different Reductionist claims about our concern about our own future: the ‘Extreme Claim’ states that there is no reason for our concern about our future at all, and the ‘Moderate Claim’ says that we are justified in caring about our survival.¹⁶³ Parfit endorses the moderate claim. He argues that if there is no deep further fact about personal identity (and he claims that there is not), psychological continuity for any reason (as represented by Relation R) is an adequate replacement of ordinary survival. So, he continues, if I reflect on this on an intellectual level, I will lose the ‘false belief’ that I have reason to care about a person who will be the ‘identical’ me in the future,¹⁶⁴ and I will also care less about my death; I will only care about someone being like me in the future. The experiences in my future life will not be linked to the experiences in my present life by chains of direct connections – and that is all there is about the fact that I shall be dead.¹⁶⁵

Ricoeur, on the other hand, argues that an individual needs to have grounds for the belief that she can make realistic plans for herself, because these plans form part of her narrative identity, as the protended future made present. He criticizes Parfit’s view as a self-protective illusion: it is only because Parfit does not link the anticipated future of a person to her past experience and present plans that he manages to maintain the illusion of an impersonal future.¹⁶⁶ I worry about what is going to happen to me in future, not just in the sense of wondering whether I shall still be there. My worries are related to my current hopes and fears, to questions like: shall I pass my viva exam, or shall I suffer utter humiliation? Will my husband remember our wedding date, or will he forget again? All of these future-oriented desires and anxieties are closely linked to everything I perceive as mine. I need to have grounds for the belief that I can make realistic plans for my own future welfare. These plans feature in my current narrative identity, thus making my expectations of the future part of my present lived self.

¹⁶³ Parfit 1987, 446.

¹⁶⁴ Parfit 1987, 280.

¹⁶⁵ Parfit 1987, 280.

¹⁶⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 136.

2.3.3 Reductionism and the Impersonal Description claim

The second area of Ricoeur's disagreement with Parfit concerns Parfit's claim that the identity of a person over time is determined by facts that can be described in an impersonal way, without referring to the notion of a person.

Ricoeur sees the root of the problem in Parfit's use of terminology. Parfit defines Relation R as a series of connected mental events, and Ricoeur claims that the word 'event' as a term of reference eliminates mineness. Mineness does not fit into the ontology of events – it describes the relation of one's lived self to one's own actions, one's own character, and one's own body. Ricoeur sees Parfit's insistence on the term 'mental event' as a further indicator that Parfit fails to make the necessary differentiation between the ipse and the idem.¹⁶⁷

Christine Korsgaard supports Ricoeur's criticism. She stresses that before examining whether a person is a subject of experiences, or just a stream of experiences that can be described without reference to a person, it is important to investigate the underlying assumptions first. Korsgaard says that Parfit's account is based on viewing a person as a location of experiences, and a person's actions as experiences.¹⁶⁸ Parfit begins by claiming that 'a person is *what has* experiences, or is the *subject of experiences*',¹⁶⁹ and then, as Korsgaard puts it, he takes away the subject.¹⁷⁰

Korsgaard's approach is similar to Ricoeur's in that she also takes a practical view on personhood. In her own account, Korsgaard distinguishes between internal (authorial) and external sources of change. Following the Kantian view that the conception of ourselves as agents is the basis for the standpoint of practical reason,¹⁷¹ she claims that internal changes preserve authorial connectedness and the continuity of the self, whereas external changes break authorial connectedness and change the self. She holds that a person is an agent who has to plan her actions, even the most trivial ones, some way into the future. In order to make the necessary choices, she needs to identify herself as a person who is constructing a specific life plan. To be what she is now, she has to identify with her future.¹⁷² She views herself as the author of her actions

¹⁶⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 132.

¹⁶⁸ Korsgaard 1989, 103.

¹⁶⁹ Parfit 1987, 223.

¹⁷⁰ Korsgaard 1989, 131.

¹⁷¹ Korsgaard 1989, 132.

¹⁷² Korsgaard 1989, 113/4.

and the leader of her life.¹⁷³ Korsgaard says that Parfit's Reductionist account disregards the authorial feature of our sense of identity.¹⁷⁴

Regarding the issue of impersonal description, Ricoeur raises the question whether subjectivity can be reduced at all. For him, the self depends on being embodied and interacting with the world. To illustrate his point, he points out the similarities between real life and realistic literary fiction. From a hermeneutical point of view, self-narrative entails a process of ongoing interpretation and is thus closely related to reading realistic literary fiction. One of the reasons why we like to engage in realistic literary fiction is that the protagonists experience something similar to what we ourselves go through: they interact with the world they live in through sensations and actions of the body. It is an integral part of the story that they perceive their own body as a dimension of themselves. Literary narrative presupposes 'our corporeal anchoring in the world'.¹⁷⁵ The imaginative variations that literary fiction weaves around the protagonists' embodiment are also variations on their self, on their lived existence that depends on relations with the world. This illustrates that subjectivity is an essential part of our interaction with the world.

Ricoeur claims that it is of insurmountable importance for us that we live in our own body, calling the corporeal and terrestrial condition of the self the 'existential invariant'. He criticizes Parfit's thought experiments because – in opposition to realistic literary fiction – they render our corporal anchoring to the world contingent and so turn the invariant into a variable in an imaginary construction.¹⁷⁶ In Parfit's account, brain states are taken to be the equivalent of the person, and they undergo various technological applications: blueprinting, cloning, transplantation, bisection, reduplication. Ricoeur holds that these science-fiction variations only deal with identity in the sense of sameness, whereas the variations of literary fiction apply to selfhood in its tension with sameness.

Atkins also criticises Parfit's denial that personal identity is in any way related to the conception of one's experiences as being one's own. She says that Parfit ignores an important feature of self-consciousness.¹⁷⁷ Atkins endorses Kant's third paralogism here: According to Kant, it is unsuitable to apply a model of permanence in time that we

¹⁷³ Korsgaard 1989, 120.

¹⁷⁴ Korsgaard 1989, 121.

¹⁷⁵ Ricoeur 1992, 150.

¹⁷⁶ Ricoeur 1992, 150.

¹⁷⁷ Atkins 2000, 331.

use to understand empirical objects to understand the persistence of subjects as well. The numerical identity of a subject cannot be proven, as it can for objects, because a subject is not of the same epistemological status as an object.¹⁷⁸ Atkins agrees with Ricoeur that the continuity of personal identity over time requires an integrated process of self-ascription that must be effected by its subject. It is not enough if others believe in the continuity of my life – I also have to live with myself.¹⁷⁹

In this and the previous section of chapter 2, I explained Ricoeur's account of narrative identity against the background of BCAs and PCAs. The objective of doing this was to show how Ricoeur's account addresses the question 'who?' (ipse) in connection with personal identity, whereas BCAs and PCAs concentrate on the question 'what?' (idem). Thus, they do not recognize the enduring dialectic between ipse and idem which, according to Ricoeur, accounts for personal development and refiguration of the narrative identity. While offsetting Ricoeur's account against Parfit's reductionist account of narrative identity, I pointed out the main differences between their model, without – however – aiming to provide a conclusive objection against Parfit's account.

In the next section, I shall give an overview of other accounts of narrative identity, and I shall explain why I chose Ricoeur's account – and not one of the others – as a foundation for my own account of the relationship between fiction reading and narrative identity.

2.4 Narrative Identity Accounts (NIAs)

Narrative Identity Accounts (NIAs) claim that a person shapes her sense of herself by weaving the events of her life together in an ongoing autobiographical narrative.¹⁸⁰ In doing this, a person takes the role of author, protagonist, and narrator in parallel. As we have seen, Ricoeur's account is a kind of NIA. There is, however, a fundamental difference between his account and most other NIAs: Ricoeur views personal identity from two perspectives, the question 'what?' and the question 'who', which cannot be reduced to each other. We shall see how this distinction gives Ricoeur's account more explanatory power than most other NIAs can offer. But first, let us have a look at the general approach of NIAs. These accounts claim that narrative is an aspect of personal

¹⁷⁸ Atkins 2000, 334.

¹⁷⁹ Atkins 2000, 344.

¹⁸⁰ Shoemaker 2008, section 2.3.

identity: what does ‘narrative’ mean in this context, and how can narrative be connected to personal identity?

Generally, a narrative is understood to be a representation of a sequence of events, which shows them as standing in some causal or meaningful connection.¹⁸¹ The recounted events should be organized in the form of a plot, laying out the events, the actions of a protagonist and the actions of other persons involved in the context of the story world. The plot has to arrange all of these element in such a way that one can both ask and answer the questions ‘who?’, ‘what?’, ‘when?’, ‘where?’, ‘how?’, and ‘why?’.¹⁸² All NIAs agree that a self-narrative is a story, with ‘I’ as the main character, the narrator, and the co-author of the story.

Weaving one’s life events together into a self-narrative may appear to be a leisurely, reflective activity, and this impression has given narrative identity accounts an air of the ivory tower in public reception. This is, however, not what most of these accounts say. They are more concerned with the needs of action and with ethical concerns¹⁸³ than with reflection. Practical identity provides the guidelines that enable a person to act and make decisions in her daily life. NIAs claim that the continuous process of maintaining a self-narrative develops a set of rules that serves as a basis for moral choices and actions.

The main point that NIA theorists argue about with their critics is how a self-narrative presents itself. Is it explicitly communicated to oneself, in moments of self-reflection, or told to others, in scenes of more or less truthful self-portrayal? Is it a running commentary in one’s head, or is there anything that gives it stability? Is there more than one self-narrative at a time, and, if there is, which, if any of them, constitutes the self? I shall discuss these questions in the subsequent sections, in particular in section 2.4.3.

Some NIAs are descriptive, some normative. Descriptive accounts (**NIDAs**) claim that self-narrative is inherent in human nature: all human beings make sense of their lives by putting the events of their lives, their memories and their expectations into narrative form – although the theories differ on whether this generates a complete autobiographical self-narrative, or only selected strands of one’s life-story. Ricoeur’s

¹⁸¹ For the distinction between narrative and other representational forms, see Currie 2010, 27pp.

¹⁸² Ricoeur 1984, 55.

¹⁸³ I use the term ‘ethical concerns’ in a broad sense here, meaning all questions dealing with a person’s leading a fulfilled life.

account is one of the most influential NIDAs in philosophy, although other models have been developing independently of his.

Based on the general claim that humans develop their own stories about themselves, NIDA theorists take differing views of the importance of self-narrative. Some put forward the strong claim that self-narrative is constitutive of personal identity, or of the self.¹⁸⁴ Others endorse the weaker statement that self-narrative does not constitute anything, but is involved in creating a practical identity; it functions to combine the different aspects of an embodied human life. I am going to discuss the importance of self-narrative in section 2.4.1.

Normative accounts (**NINAs**) claim that the process of self-narrative is conducive towards leading a good life, which is generally understood to be a unified life. There is disagreement between the different theories about whether this is always the case, and under which circumstances building a self-narrative can be dangerous. I am going to evaluate these arguments in section 2.4.2. Ricoeur's account, which is descriptive, also has a normative aspect – he says that we cannot help developing a self-narrative, but that it would be better for us if we concentrated more on self-reflection in order to refigure our self-narrative towards an improved unity of life.

Critics of the concept of narrative identity argue on two levels. First, on a phenomenological level, they claim that not all persons reflect on their lives, or if they do, they do not perceive the results of their self-reflection as narratives except in a trivial sense. I am going to discuss this criticism in section 2.4.1. Second, there are critics of the ethical version of the account: some of them claim that the creation of self-narrative does not lead to a more fulfilled life; others say that a person does not need to reflect on a self-narrative to lead a good and meaningful life. I shall tackle these questions in detail in section 2.4.2. Finally, I shall give an overview of the main points of discussion in section 2.4.3.

¹⁸⁴ Different meanings of the term 'self' will be discussed in connection with the specific accounts that have their own definitions for this.

2.4.1 NIDA: do we narrate our lives?

In this section, I shall deal with three questions: 1) What is self-narrative actually like?, 2) Must self-narrative be based on experiential memories?, 3) Does self-narrative have to be realistic and explainable?

What is self-narrative actually like?

Regarding the first question, let us start with what descriptive narrative identity accounts claim. NIDAs are based on two assumptions: first, that we have ‘story-telling brains’ that enable us to put events and persons into a coherent narrative, and second, that we are forced to use this capability in order to perceive ourselves as subjects that persist over time, and thus see ourselves as unified agents who need to make decisions about their current life and future plans. For some NIDAs, the emphasis is on the practical concern raised by a person’s continuous need to act, others focus on the concept of personal continuity over time. All of them stress that self-narrative – whether we actively engage with it or not – gives us an understanding of ourselves, and of what we want and value.

NIDAs do not imply that we consciously experience our lives as coherent narratives as we go through life– they say only that self-narrative is an ongoing process that we human beings perform. A narrative self-conception establishes itself in patterns of one’s actions, one’s commitments, one’s dispositions, and one’s relationships.¹⁸⁵

Ricoeur sees narrative identity as a necessary mediator between the actions of a person and her ethical values. The main feature that sets his account apart from others is his differentiation of the idem and the ipse. As we saw earlier, the dialectic between idem and ipse can lead to personal development.

His model can be classified as a weak NIDA. He holds that a person develops her ability to weave a self-narrative as her interaction with the world moves from the simple articulation of desires and wants to the realization that she is a person among other persons.¹⁸⁶ This insight leads her from simple desire gratification to the bigger goal of leading a life that feels continuous to her, in which she can develop self-esteem as a basis for interacting with others. To underpin her feeling of continuity, she tries to

¹⁸⁵ Mackenzie / Atkins 2010, 13.

¹⁸⁶ This is the meaning of Paul Ricoeur’s book title ‘Soi-même comme un autre’, ‘Oneself as Another’.

entwine her past experiences and her expectations for the future into a unified narrative that contains the contingent events that happened in her life and integrates them into her own story. Her own point of view introduces causal connectedness in the narrative, and this gives her reasons to make plans for the future which then become part of her self-narrative.

Ricoeur sees self-narrative as instrumental in achieving a unified sense of self. Having a unified sense of self helps us to develop self-esteem. This makes his account a NINA as well as a NIDA: on the one hand, he depicts the struggle for self-esteem as an automatic procedure, but on the other hand, self-esteem is also a moral judgment of one's self. Ricoeur describes it like this: if a conflict in my daily life and my subsequent actions prove to me that the values I act on are different from the values of my social surroundings, my sense of having a unified life is out of balance, and I suffer. My self-esteem is jeopardized. This is an incentive to me to adjust my self-narrative so that this conflict is accounted for, either by an adjustment of my own values and obligations, or by a different interpretation of the world in which I move. So the conflict drives me to a dialectic between *idem* (sameness, which includes character) and *ipse* (the self that has entered obligations towards its social world) during which the self-narrative is reflected, reviewed and reconfigured whenever self-esteem is in jeopardy.¹⁸⁷

Not all changes of the self-narrative are due to conflict. Gradual changes of the *ipse* lead to changed habits and dispositions, which will eventually 'sediment' into the story, and thus into the core of its protagonist, the *idem*. In this way, practices of the self can gradually settle into the character(p).

Ricoeur does not claim that the creation of self-narrative is always a conscious procedure, nor that a person always tells this narrative to herself or to others. Rather, the narrative serves two purposes: it is part of the process of personal development, and it provides values and rules for the person's interaction with her social environment. In his view, narrative identity is a practical identity.

Atkins' account of practical identity is similar to that of Ricoeur. I am discussing it here because she adds some detailed arguments about the importance of embodiment which strengthen Ricoeur's claims about the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*.

Atkins says that humans have selfhood because they are the kind of beings who ask themselves: 'Who am I?' and 'How should I live?'.¹⁸⁸ This description is in keeping

¹⁸⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 147.

¹⁸⁸ Atkins 2008, 6.

with Ricoeur's definition of the self, or ipse identity. Atkins builds her own narrative view on the thought that persons as agents are constituted by their bodies, where the body is interpreted as 'one's self-aware, proprioceptive sensory-motor, and cognitive body, a 'my body''.¹⁸⁹ A person perceives her body under three perspectives: in the first-person perspective she experiences the world through her body and reflects on it; in the third-person perspective she reflects on herself; and in the second-person perspective she places herself into the social context of a personal relationship. In Atkins' view, selfhood is developed during bodily interpersonal engagements during childhood. She says that a person can see herself as distinct from others only if she has experienced this in a personal relationship with a significant other.¹⁹⁰

These three perspectives are unified by the subject's self-narrative:¹⁹¹ based on the learning process from second-person relationships, the subject perceives herself as the protagonist of her own story, and her sensory experiences and social encounters become events in her autobiographical narrative. This view is similar to Ricoeur's explanation of the development of self-narrative, but Atkins goes a step further in stressing the importance of bodily contact in early childhood that constitutes the second-person view. As Ricoeur would express it, the ipse-identity, the 'self', is involved in a dialectic not only with the idem-identity, but also with the 'other than self'.¹⁹² Atkins adopts and expands Ricoeur's view here.

Atkins holds that the capacity for narrative is inherent in the human brain: narrative is imitation of action, and a person's brain structures allow her from a very early age to learn to identify others by imitating them. As the ability to interact with others develops in a social context which is structured by a value system, a person as an agent is a subject of imputation whose actions can be judged by two sets of values: by her own standards and by the standards of her community.¹⁹³ When a conflict occurs between one's actions and either one's own values or the values of the community, this leads to self-reflection as a necessary step to resolve the problem. For Atkins, being a self is basically an activity. This activity consists of self-constitution and self-understanding, where self-understanding is articulated by narrative. So for both Ricoeur and Atkins, it is important that at least some of the process of self-configuration is

¹⁸⁹ Atkins 2008, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Atkins 2008, 46.

¹⁹¹ Atkins 2008, 4.

¹⁹² Ricoeur 1992, 3.

¹⁹³ Atkins 2008, 5.

reflective. They both say that when we create a self-narrative, we follow the aim of a unified life, and they also claim that in doing so, we develop a practical wisdom in a ‘dialogical process of critical solicitude’.¹⁹⁴ In other words, our practical wisdom enables us to articulate the reasons for our actions. This is an important aspect of Ricoeur’s account which I am going to discuss later in connection with self-reflection and fiction reading.

Summing up the discussion of the first question (what is a practical identity?), the accounts of Ricoeur and Atkins present a common framework for the claim that a person needs a practical identity which is built up during the course of her life.

Must self-narrative be based on experiential memories?

The second question (must self-narrative be based on experiential memories?) comes up in Peter Goldie’s account of narrative identity. Goldie’s NIDA aims to investigate ‘the narrative sense of self’, the way that human beings think about their lives in narrative terms. His account differs from Ricoeur’s and Atkins’ accounts in that he does not discuss the aspect of personal identity as sameness,¹⁹⁵ and he is not interested in the role of embodiment in the development of the self. In his view, ‘having the ability to think about our past and future is part of what it is to be human’.¹⁹⁶ He uses the term ‘narrative sense of self’, meaning ‘a way of thinking of oneself, and of others, in narrative thinking’.¹⁹⁷ A narrative sense of self does not require deep narrative coherence in the content, the only required coherence is that it reflects one’s own life.¹⁹⁸ We use this ability in our social interactions because we have a narrative sense not only of ourselves, but also of other persons. This definition is very similar to Ricoeur’s view that all persons weave a self-narrative, but – in contrast to Ricoeur – Goldie does not think that embodiment plays an important role in the configuration of self-narrative.

Goldie combines his weak claim with the strong assertion that one does not need to have experiential memories in order to be able to think narratively of one’s past.¹⁹⁹ Goldie says that even if I have lost all my experiential memories, I can still narrate my past, based on the testimony of others, and make future plans based on that.

¹⁹⁴ Atkins 2008, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Goldie 2012, 117.

¹⁹⁶ Goldie 2012, 125.

¹⁹⁷ Goldie 2012, 118.

¹⁹⁸ Goldie 2012, 123.

¹⁹⁹ Goldie 2012, 126.

This is a strong claim, and open to criticism. I hold – and Ricoeur would agree with me here – that Goldie is wrong on this point. For Ricoeur, memory can only be created by one's own experiences, and these experiences weave the memory into the emotion-coloured narrative of our life. Goldie's assertion would be true if my future plans only included armchair decisions about my pension plan or my travel itinerary. But as soon as I get into an ethical struggle which requires an urgent decision regarding social interactions, experiential memories with their emotion-laden stories can make me 'go the extra mile', which a mere recollection of facts would not accomplish. Humans are continually involved in situations where they have to decide and to act, and as I showed earlier in this section, self-narrative is required at moments of conflict. So the question is: does it make a difference whether we resort to our self-narrative at a moment when urgent action is required, instead reflecting on our sense of self at a quiet moment? I say that there can be a difference when the conflict arises in contact with other persons: Our reaction to others often depends on how we can compare their situation with our own, and during this comparison, only experiential memories have enough psychological weight with us to play the required role.

Here is an example to illustrate this. Imagine the following situation: you suffer from loss of experiential memory. A particularly unprepossessing homeless person stumbles on an icy sidewalk and falls down in front of you, vomiting profusely, and you see that she is seriously injured, her arms and face are bleeding. You have a disposition to be helpful, though you know from your self-narrative that you are not self-sacrificing. So you ring the ambulance and wait until they arrive, then you leave. If you had not lost your experiential memory, however, you might have re-experienced the memory of the time when you yourself fell onto an icy surface, how hard and cold it was and how the fresh wounds burnt. In this case, you might have overcome your disgust and done something to ease the unfortunate person's discomfort, for instance putting a shawl under her face or dragging her away from the dirt. The experienced pain is part of your narrative sense of self.

I hold that the loss of experiential memory makes you react in accordance with your character, whereas only the re-living of experiences makes it possible for you to react with sympathy, as a fellow human being who 'goes the extra mile', because you are familiar with the phenomenological sensations and the feelings of the other through

your experiential memories. You ‘re-live’ them in your imagination prior to your decision on how to act.²⁰⁰

This example shows that although it is possible for you to narrate the events of your life without experiential memories, you need to have experiential memories (which you remember because of the emotional impact of the stories in which they are embedded) in order to have a narrative sense of self that allows you to have social interactions which go beyond mechanical reactions.

Does self-narrative have to be realistic and explainable?

For the treatment of the third question, I introduce Marya Schechtman’s account of narrative identity. It adds a further assertion to the NIAs I have presented so far, therefore I discuss it in this separate section.

For Schechtman, self-narrative constitutes the moral self, and this puts two constraints on the quality of the narrative: the reality constraint and the articulation constraint. As Schechtman’s account is both a NIDA and a NINA, I discuss it in both sections. I am including what she terms ‘the reality constraint’ and ‘the articulation constraint’ here because they contain conditions under which self-narrative could actually fail to be established.

The reality constraint requires that the self-narrative is consistent with basic facts that we know about persons and about the world we live in.²⁰¹ This is a stronger claim than that of Ricoeur, who merely stipulates that a self-narrative must be built on the principles of realistic fiction in order to form a basis for action. Atkins also endorses the reality constraint, but in a weaker form than Schechtman. For her, self-narrative must not be based on ‘factual errors of a major kind’,²⁰² for instance about places and events, because ‘such errors would disable the semantic web that links ‘who’ to ‘where’ and ‘when’’.²⁰³ Atkins claims that our narrative identity is subject to defeat if our self-view differs greatly from the view others have of us. In contrast to this, Schechtman says that such a situation will not lead to an overthrow of the self-view: even if a person’s self-narrative is built on major factual errors, it will still overlap with a

²⁰⁰ In my own account, I shall investigate the role of experiential memory in fiction reading, exploring similarities between empathy with real persons and empathy with fictional characters.

²⁰¹ Schechtman 2007, 163.

²⁰² Atkins 2008, 78.

²⁰³ Atkins 2008, 78.

possible realistic narrative of this person sufficiently to enable self-constitution.²⁰⁴ So Schechtman and Atkins disagree on this topic: Atkins says that self-narrative will fail if based on factual errors, whereas Schechtman says that such a self-narrative diminishes personhood, but does not fail completely. But both Atkins and Schechtman say that self-narrative urges us towards a correction if there is a clash between the narrative and the basic facts of the world: they say we cannot hold on to our current self-narrative if our perception of ourselves is biased by incorrect assumptions.

To integrate this urge towards correction into the concept of the reality constraint, I suggest a different definition. Our self-narrative only fails if social interaction makes us aware of an incongruity between our narrative and the world. In the cases where it does not, our self-narrative feels stable.²⁰⁵ So an alternative formulation of the reality constraint could be: self-narrative fails if the basic facts it is built on are successfully challenged by members of one's social environment. In this reformulation, however, it should be called a social acceptance restraint rather than a reality constraint.²⁰⁶ It is, however, important to remember that only strong NIDAs (NIDAs that claim that self-narrative is constitutive of personal identity) depend upon a reality constraint. For weak NIDAs (which claim that self-narrative is involved in creating a practical identity) the addition of a reality constraint is not necessary. It is possible for us to make our way through life with a practical identity that is based on some factual errors about ourselves.

The articulation constraint requires that a person should be able to answer, either to herself or to others, simple questions regarding the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of her actions. She should not be puzzled by the question, because in that case, she would not be able to appropriate actions to herself.²⁰⁷

This constraint does indeed seem necessary, provided that one concedes that it is not necessary to answer these questions verbally. It should be enough to have a sense of self-ascription.

In the preceding discussion, I have outlined the ways in which a narrative identity can be seen as a practical identity. In addition, I have presented an example that shows the importance of experiential memory for the narrative sense of self. As a last

²⁰⁴ Schechtman 1996, 127.

²⁰⁵ Regarding moral issues, it is of course a different question whether it is possible to lead a fulfilled life, a 'good life', that is built on wrong premises. But such a discussion, fascinating as it would be, would go beyond the scope of my work.

²⁰⁶ I would like to stress that practical identity is under discussion here, not metaphysical identity.

²⁰⁷ Schechtman 2007, 165.

step, I challenged the reality constraint on self-narrative, showing that only a very weak constraint is needed – i.e. one that rules out only extreme cases of factual error –, and suggesting that it should be renamed a ‘social acceptance constraint’.

Do we have to relate to our past in a positive way in order to live a unified life?

As a next step, I am going to discuss Schechtman’s claim that narrative identity only gives us a sense of self if it is based on past experiences for which we still feel a positive affective connection.

Schechtman’s narrative account of personal identity differs from the accounts of practical identity by Ricoeur and Atkins. Schechtman distinguishes between basic and subtle survival of a person. For her, basic survival lasts until a person’s death, whereas subtle survival is only given if there is no serious psychological discontinuity between our past and our current self. Thus, her definition of subtle survival is always relative to a past self that is viewed in comparison with the self we are conscious of at the moment. Schechtman’s additional claim for self-narrative is that subtle survival is only given as far we have a positive affective bond with our past, as far as we have ‘empathic access’ to our former self. If we do not still share the same values, emotions, likes and dislikes, she says, there is no subtle survival.²⁰⁸

Unlike Ricoeur, Schechtman does not attach any importance to the role of human embodiment in the process of self-narrative, but her account is similar to Ricoeur’s in her criticism of psychological continuity accounts. She also argues that it is not enough to examine numerical identity and success conditions of survival. Trading numerical identity for qualitative identity, she says, works only at the cost of no longer being able to define a reason for caring about one’s personal concerns. Her main interest is in the quality of personal survival. She says that subtle survival implies personal continuation on a practical level that gives cause for morality, self-interested concern, autonomy, and authenticity.²⁰⁹ New decisions are informed by recognition and pull of characteristics which belong to a past self that we still feel positively connected with.

Schechtman agrees with Ricoeur and Atkins that the appropriation of actions as one’s own requires self-narrative, but she has an issue with theories of narrative identity in general. She says that usually, theories of narrative identity have one fault: even

²⁰⁸ Schechtman 2001, 98.

²⁰⁹ Schechtman 2001, 98.

psychological changes that seem identity-threatening can be told in a coherent self-narrative, and the narrative glosses over the fundamental change without being able to account for it.²¹⁰ These theories of narrative identity, she says, hide losses of subtle survival, and she claims that her own theory mends this fault.

To illustrate her own theory, she uses an example that Derek Parfit created in a different context:²¹¹ A young Russian socialist is going to inherit a large estate within a few years, and he plans to give it to the peasants who live there. Fearing that the irresistible enticement of money will weaken his current ideals in the future, he signs a document that binds him to give away the land as soon as he inherits, and which can only be revoked with his wife's consent. He then asks her never to give that consent because the person who would ask her for it would only be 'his corrupted later self'.²¹²

For Schechtman, this example shows that it is important for a person's continued identity that no radical psychological changes occur. In her terminology, the corrupted Russian in the future will be only a case of 'basic survival' because there is no empathic access between his corrupted self and his idealistic past self. There would, however, be 'subtle survival' if he were to hold on to his ideals, as in that case the empathic access to his past self would allow him to base his actions and decisions on his past learnings and experiences.

Schechtman criticises other narrative theories for making this kind of transition appear plausible too easily: the young Russian would be able to imagine many possible narratives that give good reasons for his gradual transition from an idealist to a capitalist. The change would appear to be continuous, although the overall effect would be drastic.

She uses another example to demonstrate the difference between basic and subtle survival: a party girl marries, gets a career and grows up into a serious matron. When serious matron looks back on her wild youth, she cannot evoke the emotions and predilections she had at that time. Schechtman claims that in this case, the change is identity-threatening because subtle survival is not maintained. NIDA followers would hold that the changes from giddy girl to responsible matron are woven into a coherent self-narrative, but Schechtman says that this is not enough to preserve identity.²¹³ Here, we only have basic survival. If, however, the party girl grows into a less serious matron,

²¹⁰ Schechtman 2001, 100.

²¹¹ Parfit 1987, 327.

²¹² Schechtman 2004, 93.

²¹³ Schechtman 2001, 100.

she recalls how exciting it felt to go to parties. She feels wistful when she watches party-goers although now she no longer wants to join them because she is wiser now, knowing how dull these parties turned out to be. Her values, emotions, likes and dislikes that drove her to her party life in the past have survived in some form. The not-so-serious matron has empathic access to her past, although she recognizes that her tastes and circumstances have changed. Subtle survival has been achieved.

Without empathic access, Schechtman claims, the rich continuity of consciousness is missing, which amounts to a loss of self. She concedes that there can be exceptional cases of gradual personal development in which there is no loss of self although continuity of consciousness is weak. But she limits these cases to personality changes that were brought about by internal motivations, and she claims that for these, a minimum of empathic access is possible. Such personality changes could be imagined in the case of the Russian nobleman: if he were to change his mind about giving his inheritance to the peasants not because the riches corrupted him, but because he found out that the peasants would use the money to ruin themselves, then Schechtman would probably concede that there is such a minimum empathic access.²¹⁴

Looking at Ricoeur's definition of personal identity as the dialectic of *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (self-constancy), it becomes apparent that there are similarities to, as well as important differences from, the account that Schechtman endorses. For Ricoeur, the case of the corrupted Russian and the serious matron would be examples of an *idem* and an *ipse* that cease to overlap in time. The Russian's change of habits and predilections after inheriting the money would 'sediment' into his character(p) (which forms part of his *idem*), thus creating a crisis between his self-constancy demanding *ipse* and his changed *idem*. In Ricoeur's model, all aspects of a person undergo permanent change and re-figuration. Schechtman criticizes narrative accounts for accommodating changes of character too easily, and thus masking a loss of self. Ricoeur, however, says there is never a 'loss of self', but there are different time horizons for the *idem* and the *ipse*. When they do not overlap, there are tensions and conflicts which lead to a painful process of self-refiguration. This process itself becomes part of a person's self-narrative.

Schechtman's differentiation between 'basic' and 'subtle' survival might be seen as a simplified way of viewing the dialectic between *idem* and *ipse*: Her 'empathic

²¹⁴ Schechtman 2004, 93.

access' is achieved – in Ricoeur's terms – when *idem* and *ipse* overlap. But Schechtman does not explain what happens to a person who loses empathic access to a past self – is this past self simply lost to her as a fund of decision-supporting knowledge? Does she just shrug it off? Ricoeur's model of a dialectic between old obligations and new character traits shows that personal development cannot be described as simply as that.

Thus, in comparison to Ricoeur's account, Schechtman's theory of empathic access has two gaps. First, although she claims that we create a self-narrative, she does not make an attempt to explain how the changes in our self-narrative are effected. Second, she cannot distinguish time horizons between current and past selves because she does not differentiate between *ipse* and *idem*. The investigation of time horizons of *idem* and *ipse* is an important part of Ricoeur's account, because it explains the change process of the self-narrative.

One aspect of Schechtman's 'empathic access' view seems intuitively convincing at first glance: if we re-discover some of our current favourite character traits in a memory of our previous self, we experience a warm feeling of approval and commitment. But negative emotions can also constitute a strong emotional bond with the past. When I think of the time when I got helplessly drunk at a school outing as a teenager, I blush with embarrassment even now. This feeling is strong not because of a positive empathic access, but because I no longer have the values, emotions, likes and dislikes I had as a teenager. Unpleasant as such feelings are, they also constitute what Schechtman calls 'thick continuity of consciousness'. Schechtman, however, says that if I no longer share the values, likes and emotions I had in the past, my past behaviour is no longer intelligible to me. In my example, however, this is not true – I remember the feeling of helpless insecurity that drove me to get drunk, but I no longer share it. Hence, her concept of empathic access does not cover everything that makes up a rich continuity of consciousness. This flaw in Schechtman's account is highlighted by Simon Beck.²¹⁵ He points out that the reason why he cringes at the things he did at the age of sixteen is that he has a negative affective connection to the past: he remembers what it felt like to do those things, he disapproves of doing them, and he is ashamed of having to call them 'mine'. Without empathic access, there would be no need for him to be cringe at his former behaviour. So empathic access can only be a consistent concept if it also covers feelings of being alienated from our past desires and passions.

²¹⁵ Beck 2008, 75.

To sum up: In the preceding discussion, I compared Schechtman's theory of narrative identity with empathic access to Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and found two gaps where Ricoeur's account can help. First, Schechtman does not explain how a person can have a unified sense of self. Ricoeur's model of the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse* illuminates how radical personal changes can be woven into a self-narrative. Second, Schechtman cannot explain how a person can develop a sense of shame, pity, or guilt about her past. Ricoeur shows how conflicts between *idem* and *ipse* have an emotional impact that leads to self-reflection and self-refiguration.

How many selves are there?

As a next point, I shall discuss a general criticism of all narrative identity accounts. Galen Strawson is a forceful advocate of this criticism. His objection to narrative theories is mainly phenomenological.

Strawson distinguishes between 'one's experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as a human being taken as a whole, and one's experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as an internal mental entity or 'self' of some sort'.²¹⁶ He claims that there are four ways a person can experience life over time: narrative, non-narrative, diachronic, or episodic. In his view, all narrative identity accounts (descriptive as well as normative) are wrong because they are based on the assumption that life is always experienced in a diachronic way. The only way a descriptive narrative view can be true, he argues, is in the trivial sense of describing the necessary steps of an action, for instance, making coffee.²¹⁷

Strawson challenges the narrativists' claim that self-narrative is necessary to develop a sense of self, and thus a sense of personal unity, in order to maintain one's self-esteem. He holds that it is possible for an episodic person to lead a fully moral and satisfactory life, even if she is not interested in the idea that she has a past or a future, that is, if no self-narrative is involved.²¹⁸

He says that often, when we think about our past, we have the feeling that things that were done by us were done by a different self. Apparently Henry James was so awed by one of his early works in later life that he felt that it was the work of a

²¹⁶ Strawson 2007, 85.

²¹⁷ Strawson 2004, 439.

²¹⁸ Strawson 1997, 419.

person other than himself. This thought moves Strawson to the claim that our lives consist of a sequence of selves, each of which is experienced for a relatively short duration.²¹⁹

Several objections can be made against this claim. First, Strawson's use of the term 'experience' shows that his definition of 'self' is limited to the range of our current consciousness. This is a problem because the way a person acts in her social nexus does not only depend on the content of her current conscious experiences, but also on facts about herself which are outside her current experiential horizon. Strawson does not take any subconscious or unconscious facts about persons into account although they can influence their current lives.

A Ricoeurian objection to Strawson's theory of episodic selves would be that episodic experience takes diachronic self-experience for granted, as it presupposes the phenomenological structures of temporality. When Strawson anticipates giving a lecture before a large audience in two months' time, for instance,²²⁰ he claims that any concern about this is just triggered by his instinct of self-preservation. What he does not consider here is that – even if he is not conscious of doing this – he draws upon his own experiences of what it felt like to give lectures in the past, of what he did when there were unpleasant questions, of how he dealt with aggressive students or insistent journalists, and that he evaluates these experiences to build story variations about how he is going to approach these situations in future. Even if he claims that for him, every experience is episodic, his past experiences shape his present plans regarding the future, although he may not be conscious of this. I argue that even if he is unaware of this, he uses narratives from his past to create narrative projections of his future, thus adding to the web of self-narrative that belongs to him.

A second, and crucial, objection to Strawson is that his sole focus on experience in the sense of self-view prevents him from considering the other aspects of human life: the ongoing need to act and to interact with other persons. For Strawson, the case is simple: Everything that influences his actions and unifies his life is present in his current conscious experience, and there is no need for him to resort to a self-narrative in order to act. He says that he does not narrate his life. I would like to introduce some doubts about this.

²¹⁹ Strawson 2007, 89.

²²⁰ Strawson 1997, 420.

Let us imagine a simple example: A boy was beaten up by a classmate at school. How would the boy decide what to do now? It is hard to see how he could do this without drawing on his past experiences and his sense of what sort of person he is. If he sees himself as someone who had better not stick his nose out too far, knowing from past experience that he has always hated pain more than anything else, he might think up an excuse not to go to school the next day. If his image of himself is that of a hero in the making who has history of successful fighting, he might take boxing lessons and pay the bully back in kind himself after more training. If he thinks he has been developing a Machiavelli-like cleverness, he might persuade his big brother to beat up the bully the next day. This everyday example shows two things: first, that even people who are not set on making ethical plans for their lives do make plans for the future which are based on the way they see their own life and their self-narrative, and second, that the future self involved in these plans does not seem remote to them. The direction of our concern for the future – of what exactly we want to achieve for ourselves – is far from being hard-wired, as Strawson claims.²²¹ Strawson says that our concern for our well-being is based on our instinct for self-preservation – he does not, however, consider that our models of well-being are more complex than that, and thus subject to change, depending on the development of our life-story. Our concern for the future appears to depend on the experience and self-estimation of us as persons, which is part of the story of our lives.

A third objection to Strawson's theory is that his distinction between diachronic and episodic persons is not sharp enough to support his conclusion. On the one hand, he claims that the diachronic and the episodic style of self-experience are fundamentally different, but on the other hand he says that one is not necessarily consistent, across one's life, in one's experience of oneself as an episodic.²²² Even an episodic self can have moments when she feels connected with emotionally charged moments in her past, or dreaded events in her future, such as imminent death. How consistently does a person have to experience herself as episodic to justify calling herself an episodic? The difference between episodic and non-narrative on one side and diachronic and narrative on the other side seems ill-defined. Even a diachronic and narrative person does not have to reconfigure her self-narrative continually to have a basis for her actions and decisions. As long as there is no conflict between the person's

²²¹ Strawson 1997, 420.

²²² Strawson 2004, 431.

self-narrative and the world she lives in, there is no reason to pay attention to the narrative. It could run on as ‘Galen Strawson happily defended episodic ethics until the end of his life’. Strawson’s distinction is too vague to enable us to establish that someone was truly episodic, as opposed to a self-narrator whose sense of self has never been challenged.

It is worth noting that Strawson’s view of narrativity seems to assume that narrative is linear.²²³ He criticizes the metaphor ‘stream of consciousness’, claiming that there is no unity of conscious experience, that ‘consciousness is continually *restarting*’.²²⁴ Whether or not this may be true in neurophysiological terms, experientially it is not because consciousness is not one-dimensional. A more fitting metaphor for conscious thought would be polyphony,²²⁵ which provides a unified piece of music although different instruments play different melodies at disparate or overlapping intervals. This piece of music would not be one consistently composed work of art throughout a person’s life – it would gradually change in character. It might be a piece by Led Zeppelin during puberty, changing to a Freddy Mercury song in adolescence, and ending up like Fauré’s Requiem in old age. The important thing is that any changes would be gradually introduced or developed from earlier themes: for instance a new instrument (an interest in philosophy) could provide an occasional counterpoint before it begins to be involved in a new motif, whereas in the meantime other melodies (like enjoying a beer with friends, running a Marathon, planning a career, getting into fights) start, stop or run on, either in harmony or disharmony. Strawson’s focus on episodic self-experience cannot account for these aspects of consciousness.

There is another, more intuitive, objection against Strawson’s view of episodic selves: we see other persons in a narrative way. When I watch Strawson debating with Schechtman on YouTube,²²⁶ I am conscious of the things I know about him (who his father was, what his articles are about), and I speculate on the private conversations he might have had with Schechtman, on philosophy or other topics. This is not because I am a particularly prying person, but because humans in general love to hear, or watch,

²²³ ‘Linear’ is defined as ‘Progressing from one stage to another in a single series of steps; sequential’, see <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/linear>.

²²⁴ Strawson 1997, 422.

²²⁵ Tucholsky 1927: ‘man denkt ungeheuer schnell, man denkt manchmal aber auch polyphon – während ein schwerer Gedanke wie ein Glockenton in der Tiefe brummt, hüpfen oben die Affen der Assoziation auf und ab.’ – my own translation: ‘you think incredibly fast, sometimes you think polyphonically – while a deep thought buzzes at the bottom like the sound of a bell, the apes of association are frolicking above.’

²²⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF74zq7L7Io>.

stories about other humans. If we tell ourselves stories about the lives of others who are in similar situations as we are, is it plausible to assume that we do not do the same with our own lives? So at least the claim of weak NIDAs seems intuitively convincing.

To sum up: I challenged Strawson's account of episodic selves on four main counts. First, his claim that one does not need a narrative sense of self to maintain one's self-esteem is open to criticism because he does not consider the conflicts that we encounter in our daily tasks of interacting with other people. Second, his distinction between episodic and diachronic selves does not seem sharp enough to be helpful. Third, and most importantly, I pointed out that Strawson's view of narrative as a linear activity does not do justice to the complex network of experiences which makes up the flow of human consciousness. Finally, his criticism of narrative identity accounts is counter-intuitive as it is highly plausible that we see our own life, similar to other persons' lives, as having a narrative structure. The fundamental problem with Strawson's 'episodic' account appears to be that he misunderstands the narrative view: narrative theorists do not say that we try to live our lives as if we were characters(f) in a novel, and they do not say that we are consciously aware of weaving a self-narrative.

2.4.2 NINA: does narrative provide a unity to one's life?

Following the discussion of descriptive accounts of narrative identity (NIDA) in the previous section, I am now going to give an overview of normative accounts of narrative identity (NINAs). Most NINAs make claims about whether or not building a narrative identity, or developing a sense of narrative identity, can help a person to lead a fuller and more satisfactory life. On top of the descriptive claim that self-narrative is something that 'we do', they say that it makes a difference whether or not the secondary reflection involved in self-narrative is actively supported. All NINAs agree that it is beneficial for a person to have as much personal unity as possible in order to lead a meaningful life, but they disagree on how this could be achieved in the context of self-narrative. There are two particular bones of contention between NINA supporters: first, whether it is necessary for personal unity that one's self-narrative is based on facts, and second, whether it is necessary to endorse one's favoured memories and character traits in order to maintain personal unity.

Does our self-narrative need to be based on facts?

For normative accounts, this question is slightly different from the problem of the reality constraint discussed in the previous section. Here, the requirement that Atkins postulated for the descriptive account of narrative identity²²⁷ – that self-narrative fails if it is based on grave factual errors – comes in again, this time as a normative prerequisite for a good and unified life.

This view is endorsed by Ricoeur, Schechtman, Atkins, and Goldie, in different degrees. Ricoeur and Schechtman both say that one's self-narrative needs to stand the test of action, and that one's major factual errors about one's self can be corrected by interaction with one's social nexus and subsequent self-reflection.

Atkins partially agrees with this, saying that 'all elements of a narrative identity must stand in relations of mutual implication and explanation', but she does not make assumptions about how major factual errors about one's self could be corrected.²²⁸ She also says that delusional mental states can prevent a coherent narrative identity.²²⁹ Ricoeur does not particularly mention delusional cases, but the following example shows that this case needs to be considered.

In Patricia Highsmith's short story 'The Heroine':²³⁰ a young woman works as a nurse for a family with two children, and she is disproportionately grateful for having the job. In her own self-reflective view, she is so unworthy of her position that she decides she has to do a heroic deed in order to deserve it. So she sets fire to the house with the intention of saving the children at the very last moment. She makes no special preparations for the rescue because she is convinced that her passionate longing is enough to ensure success. The story of the heroine ends when the fire becomes threatening, so we do not know whether she manages to rescue the children. If she does not, and survives, the terrible outcome might cure her self-delusion and lead her to a better life. However, if she does save the children, and survives, this success will probably strengthen her delusion. This example shows a flaw in the accounts of Ricoeur and Schechtman. They say that one's self-narrative will lead to self-reflection in case of conflict – I am not going to argue with this statement –, but they do not investigate what happens if one's self-narrative is never put to the test of action. I think they should add

²²⁷ see discussion in section 2.4.1.

²²⁸ Atkins 2008, 79.

²²⁹ Atkins 2004, 347.

²³⁰ Highsmith 2007.

this possibility to their accounts, and concede that in such a case, a self-narrative may persist even if it contains basic factual errors.

Goldie is also much stricter on the subject of self-delusion than Ricoeur and Schechtman. He insists that our narrative sense of self must be based on facts – if it is not, it is not a sense of self, because it does not refer to us.²³¹ To illustrate why a true narrative sense of self is important for a good life, he points out four ‘fictionalizing tendencies’ that endanger the creation of a realistic self-narrative.²³² The first one he identifies is that we plot our lives, meaning that we tend to forget that we are only the co-authors of the representation of our lives, not only dependent on our own plans but also on other agents, and on other contingencies beyond our control.²³³ The danger in this particular tendency lies in making unrealistic plans for the future. Nevertheless, it is not quite clear why Goldie sees this as problematic for one's sense of self. If a person has no confidence in her authorial power over her own life at all, personal development is impossible. On the other hand, Goldie's concern makes sense where extreme cases like Highsmith's heroine are concerned. The heroine imagines that she will be able to carry the children out of a burning house, and it is clear that she endangers them as well as herself by acting on the plot of her fictional self-narrative.

The second fictionalizing tendency is detecting agency in the world where it is not.²³⁴ In works of fiction, events typically do not happen by accident, but because some action caused them, thus adding more coherence to the story. In real life, there is usually less coherence, and if a person tries to create it artificially by imagining action, her story moves away from reality and is no longer a reliable basis for planning. That is a convincing argument. However, it is not clear why this fictionalizing tendency should always lead to unrealistic plans for the future. There may be cases when this tendency actually helps a person to carry on with her life after a tragedy; for instance, a mother whose child dies in infancy might find the thought ‘The angels took her away to Heaven’ so consoling that she can overcome her grief.

Goldie's third fictionalizing tendency concerns the desire for narrative closure. He claims that fictional persons have their end in them in the beginning,²³⁵ whereas real lives do not. Persons who suffer pain or loss are often tempted to find an answer to the

²³¹ Goldie 2012, 127.

²³² Goldie 2012, 150.

²³³ Goldie 2012, 161/2.

²³⁴ Goldie 2012, 163.

²³⁵ Goldie 2012, 165.

question ‘why did this happen to me’, expecting the sequence of events in their lives to be tied up just as neatly as a piece of erotetic fictional narrative that provides answers to the question it raises. This fictionalizing tendency hinders the people who give way to it from accepting their pain and grief and going on with their lives. I endorse this view.

In his fourth fictionalizing tendency, Goldie describes the danger of imposing genre on one's life.²³⁶ Genre assigns certain attributes to a main character, thus flattening the character to a cliché: the heroes are more heroic than in real life, the children more angelic, the clowns funnier. If a person sees herself in a particular role taken from genre literature, she might feel compelled to stick to this role, making decisions which she would not have made otherwise. Goldie claims that this has a bad side and a good side to it. If someone sees herself type-cast as a victim, her actions may be unnecessarily defeatist, and she will never be able to change because the outcome will always confirm her delusion. As a positive example, Goldie cites cases where a person deliberately overestimates her powers in order to deal with a situation, in order to be effectively either verified or falsified in the attempt. If the situation does not develop in the positive sense that the genre role seemed to demand, the person will be able to reflect on why it went wrong and how she should try to change to do better in life. If Highsmith's heroine were to survive after not having saved the children, she might get rid of her delusion and do some real good for other children. As Goldie says, ‘seeing oneself in a certain light can help one to stick to one's resolutions, and this can be for the good’²³⁷. But it is not easy to say under which circumstances the good will be possible. In the case of Highsmith's heroine, the price for her own good would be the lives of two children, and it seems cynical to call it ‘good’ under these circumstances.

Summing up, I agree with the NINAs of Ricoeur, Schechtman, Atkins, and Goldie that NINAs (in contrast with NIDAs) should incorporate a (strong) reality constraint. However, in contrast to Ricoeur and Schechtman, I claim that factual errors in self-narrative cannot always be corrected by interaction. I criticised Goldie's account of fictionalizing tendencies on two points: in my view, there can be cases when the tendency to plot our lives and the tendency to detect agency where there is none can actually help people to lead a unified life. However, I agree with his view of the danger of fictionalizing tendencies for narrative closure and for imposing genre on one's life.

²³⁶ Goldie 2012, 169.

²³⁷ Goldie 2012, 171.

Do I need to have empathic access to my past life to achieve personal unity?

The question whether it is necessary to favourably endorse one's self-narrative in order to maintain personal unity comes up in connection with Schechtman's account of empathic access. As discussed in the previous section, Beck criticizes Schechtman's claim that only empathic access to one's past secures rich continuity of consciousness. Beck maintains that empathic access in Schechtman's definition does not cover strong negative emotional engagement to one's past, but that negative emotional engagement also unifies the self.

Goldie picks up this argument and applies it to his normative claim that self-narrative should be used for self-development. He says that if survival means that empathic access to one's past actions is maintained, and empathic access is only possible for past actions one feels positively connected with, this effectively prevents personal progress through radical change.²³⁸ For him, self-directed reactive attitudes to the past are especially important in cases of disapproval because they enable self-forgiveness and personal progress. Once again, I endorse this point.

In this section, I argued that normative accounts of narrative identity are right in claiming that the ongoing self-reflection involved in narrative self-constitution can help a person to lead a more unified and fulfilled life. On the other hand, there are fictionalizing tendencies, and dangers of self-delusion, which can have the opposite effect. Finally, I agreed with Beck and Goldie that affective recollection of the past is more likely to be good for self-development if it includes both positive and negative affects.

2.4.3 NIA: summing up

In the sections on NIAs, I outlined the most important accounts of narrative identity, both descriptive and normative.

In the section about descriptive accounts, I presented Ricoeur's account as one of the most sophisticated models of narrative identity as a practical identity. His definition of the dialectic between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (self) accounts for the ongoing struggle of the embodied person to maintain personal unity in her interactions

²³⁸ Goldie 2012, 118.

with her social world. After discussing the question of whether narrative identity is a practical identity in connection with the accounts of Ricoeur and Atkins, I showed that there are convincing arguments for the claim that a person has a practical identity which is being developed and re-configured during the course of her life, and that this practical identity is a narrative identity. I criticized the reality-constraint on self-narrative by showing that only a weak version is applicable to strong NIDAs, and that weak NIDAs do not require a reality constraint.

Regarding the role of experiential memory, I contradicted Goldie by demonstrating that you can narrate your life without experiential memories, but you cannot have a full narrative sense of self without them.

Schechtman claims that narrative identity can only provide us with a rich sense of self as far as we still share the values and emotions of our past selves. I came to the conclusion that empathic access needs to cover negative as well as positive strong emotional engagement with one's past.

As a last step in the discussion of descriptive accounts of narrative identity, I examined Strawson's claim that there are people who are episodic, and do not narrate their lives at all. I argued that he does not consider the conflicts that we encounter in our daily tasks of interacting with other people. To deal with these, I argued, we require a deep sense of self which has narrative form. My discussion of Strawson's account of episodic selves shows how and why his account differs from Ricoeur's account of narrative identity: I do not aim to develop a conclusive case against Strawson's account, as this would be beyond the scope of this work.

In the section on normative accounts of narrative identity, I discussed the accounts of Ricoeur, Atkins and Goldie, with a special emphasis on the problems of self-delusion and 'fictionalising tendencies'. I argued that ongoing self-reflection involved in narrative self-constitution is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a person to lead a more unified and fulfilled life.

For my own account, I am going to follow the general outlines of Ricoeur's account of narrative identity as a practical identity. I adopt his definition of *idem* and *ipse*, I agree with his definition of independent time horizons for *idem* and *ipse*, and I take up his notion of self-narrative. For me, however, narrative identity is a descriptive account (NIDA) rather than a normative account (NINA). Regarding Ricoeur's view of fiction reading in connection with narrative identity, I am going to fill two gaps in his account: how emotions can be generated in fiction reading, and how experiential

memories can influence the reading process. I am also going to challenge Ricoeur's view that self-reflection always leads to an improved unity of life: I say that this is only possible under certain conditions. This is why I am not offering a NINA. I shall discuss these points in chapter 8.

PART II: READING AS A GAME OF MAKE-BELIEVE

3 Walton: the reader as a reflexive prop in a game of make-believe

My aim for this work is to explore the connections between fiction reading and the reader's self-narrative, bringing together and improving two philosophical models: Ricoeur's account of narrative identity and Walton's account of fiction reading. In Part I, I introduced Ricoeur's account of narrative identity and compared it to other contemporary models of personal identity. Now, in Part II, I present Kendall Walton's account of fiction reading as a game of make-believe. His account is an important factor in my own model of fiction reading in connection with narrative identity because it has a special focus on reader participation. The association of reader participation with the concept of make-believe set his account apart from other accounts of fiction reading.

In the first section of this chapter, I shall give an overview of the account as Walton presents it himself; in the second section, I shall examine critical issues and open points. It is not my aim to defend Walton's account against his critics. However, the discussion of these issues introduces some issues about the nature of the reading experience that I will continue to investigate as I present my own account.

In Part III, I shall show how my own account relates to Walton's model, and I shall identify and fill two gaps in his account.

3.1 Overview

In his work *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Walton presents a theory of representation that is based on an analogy. He holds that engaging with a work of art is analogous to a child's game of make-believe. I shall discuss this analogy in detail because I shall draw on it in chapter 8 where I compare Ricoeur's view of narrative identity to Walton's view of participation in a work of fiction. I shall also outline Walton's accounts of fictional truths, of how fictional truths are generated, of fictional worlds, of participation in a work of fiction, and of 'quasi-emotions'. Finally, I am going to examine Walton's account of 'identifying' with a character(f).

The analogy of fiction reading with a child's game of make-believe, Walton claims, leads to valuable insights into what it means to engage with a work of fiction. He discovers important parallels: for instance, the use of imagination is required for both activities. He also holds that a child's practice of make-believe continues later in life in interaction with representational works of art.²³⁹ I am now going to outline the main points of his account.

Imagine two children playing a game of 'explorers': in turns, each child draws a line as far away from herself as possible, and the other child has to jump onto this line. If she does not get both feet on to the line, she falls into an abyss and loses the game.

To play this game successfully, the children need to agree about three aspects of the game: a fictional world, a set of relevant rules, and the props that can be used. In my example, the game world is a dangerous mountain territory. The set of rules specifies that if you land on a line with both feet, you gain a safe foothold on a mountain ledge; if you miss the line, or land only on one foot, you fall into the void. The props that can be used are: a stick that represents a torch to highlight a rock, lines that represent solid rocky ledges, and the unlined ground that represents an abyss.

It is an important feature of games of make-believe that the players themselves are props in the game. In my example, they take the role of explorers and assign attributes to this role. They imagine, *de se*, that they are skilled mountaineers and can jump across chasms because of their training and experience.

Where, then, are the parallels to fiction reading? When I read the first chapter of William Golding's *Pincher Martin*²⁴⁰, for instance, I accept it as fictional that the action takes place during the Second World War, that a boat was torpedoed, and that a man called Pincher Martin is swimming in the sea, in danger of drowning. This defines the fictional world, and the text invites me to imagine further details of this world and the novel's protagonist. I become moved by Pincher Martin's plight and want him to succeed. Just as in the game of make-believe, I accept that there is a rocky ledge, in *Pincher Martin*, I accept that the hero is about to drown.

Walton calls this kind of engagement 'participation'.²⁴¹ Participation can pertain to a game of make-believe or to a work of representational art. For Walton, participation in a work of fiction is a species of imaginative activity involving props,

²³⁹ Walton 1990, 12.

²⁴⁰ Golding 1956.

²⁴¹ Walton 1990, 209.

very similar to participation in a game of make-believe. A work of fiction is a prop that generates fictional truths for the reader. Participation in a work of fiction means that a reader accepts the rules set by the work of fiction and applies them to herself, imagining the propositions that the work of fiction requires her to imagine and accepting them as fictionally true.

Fictional truths

What does the term ‘fictionally true’ mean? Walton calls a proposition ‘fictionally true’ if it is ‘true in a fictional world’, if there is a prescription that it is to be imagined in a game of make-believe. Walton says: ‘A proposition’s fictionality consists in a prescription to imagine it.’²⁴²

In my children’s games example, it is true in the game world of ‘explorers’ that each player is an experienced and competitive mountaineer. The proposition that each player is an expert mountaineer is fictional, and the fact that it is fictional is a fictional truth.²⁴³

There is, however, a big difference in the ways that fictional truths are generated in games of make-believe and in engagement with a work of fiction: In a game of make-believe, the players are free to choose their props and the rules under which they operate, as long as they agree about the rules and the props among themselves.

In fiction reading, the chosen work of fiction will act as a prop for the reader’s imaginings when she participates in it. In contrast to games of make-believe, this prop already prescribes many of the features that the reader’s imagination will work on. These features include the work’s genre, aspects of the fictional world, characteristics of fictional persons and, in most cases, a fictional time setting. Among these, the work’s genre is the most important. For instance, *The End of the Affair* is a novel set in London during the Second World War. A reader who takes it to be a guide to London restaurants, or a science fiction novel about a war with the Martians, does not take part in the game which the novel requires her to imagine. If the reader is completely unaware of the social and historical background of the work of fiction and the intentions of the author, she is not able to engage with the game of make-believe suggested by the work.

²⁴² Walton 1990, 139.

²⁴³ Walton 1990, 35.

Walton says that a fiction reader plays an ‘authorized game of make-believe’ if her imaginings are in line with the relevant rules given by the work of fiction. If her imaginings run contrary to these rules, she plays an unauthorized game.²⁴⁴

Generating fictional truths

The generation of fictional truths from a work of fiction depends on the ‘principles of generation’ that are valid in the ‘the relevant social context’,²⁴⁵ and on the reader’s grasp of them. Walton points out that a reader can obtain fictional truths directly (primary) or indirectly (implied).²⁴⁶ In *The End of the Affair*, it is an implied fictional truth that Maurice’s room has a window, although this is not mentioned explicitly – the reader is supposed to imagine this as given because in the novel, it is fictional that a bomb destroyed a tree that had formerly blocked the light in his room. In a work of fiction, the directly generated fictional truths are usually in the minority; the reader is required to fill the gaps of the described fictional world from the implications suggested by the work of fiction.

Is it possible to find a full definition of which principles of generation for implied fictional truths there are, and how they work? Walton investigates two widely-used approaches: the Reality Principle (RP) and the Mutual Belief Principle (MBP).

Walton gives this definition of the RP:

‘If p_1, \dots, p_n are the propositions whose functionality a representation generates directly, another proposition, q , is fictional in it if, and only if, were it the case that p_1, \dots, p_n it would be the case that q ’²⁴⁷.

If a reader follows the RP in order to fill the gaps in the work of fiction with implied fictional truths, she pretends that everything that is primarily fictional in the work of fiction has implications which can be followed through her own knowledge of the real world, and can thus be verified and filled out with more realistic detail.²⁴⁸

On the one hand, RP does a good job of explaining why we assume that a fictional world and characters(f) are very much like the real world and real people. On the other hand, works of fiction are often not realistic. They can contain propositions

²⁴⁴ Walton 1990, 397.

²⁴⁵ Walton 1991, 381.

²⁴⁶ Walton 1990, 140.

²⁴⁷ Walton 1990, 145.

²⁴⁸ Walton 1990, 145.

that contradict each other, or are incompatible with the features of the real world. For instance, in Jules Verne's novel *De la terre à la lune* (1865), the reader is mandated to imagine that the space travellers are subject to gravitation until they have reached a certain point between the Earth and the Moon. As modern readers know, this is not in line with the laws of physics. Here, proposition p is 'Space travel to the moon is possible', and proposition q is 'Gravitation decreases gradually when travellers to the moon move away from the earth, ceasing altogether at some point between the earth and the moon'. Here, the fictional truth of q cannot be derived from the fictional truth of p; modern scientific knowledge tells us that q is not true. So in this example, RP does not help with the generation of implied fictional truths because the novel gives a mistaken picture of the situation of the passengers within the projectile. To deal with problems like this, it is possible to apply the Mutual Belief Principle (MBP) instead.

This is Walton's definition of the MBP:

'If p_1, \dots, p_n are the propositions whose functionality a representation generates directly, another proposition, q , is fictional in it if and only if it is mutually believed in the artist's society that were it the case that p_1, \dots, p_n it would be the case that q '.²⁴⁹

MBP tries to account for the implication of fictional truths from direct fictional truths which are not accounted for by the Reality Principle. It holds that if a work of fiction generates a direct proposition, implied propositions are also fictional for this work if it is (or was, at the time of the work's creation) commonly believed in the artist's community that they can be derived from the direct proposition.²⁵⁰ In *De la terre à la lune*, all scientific details are based on what was known in Jules Verne's time and society, so the reader following the MBP will accept that proposition q can be derived from proposition p. She will imagine the strange gravitational experiences of the travellers and try to fill out further details that go along with them.

As Walton states, there are many other implications at work which are not sanctioned by RP or MBP.²⁵¹ Among these are myths, legends, and fixed iconography which are part of the artist's cultural background. Artists often devise new ways of generating fictional truths by challenging the reader's power of association and her

²⁴⁹ Walton 1990, 151.

²⁵⁰ Walton 1990, 151.

²⁵¹ Walton 1990, 161.

knowledge of literary tradition as well as of the real world.²⁵² Walton says that for a reader who wants to find the fictional truths suggested by a work of fiction, ‘there is no substitute for a good nose’.²⁵³

The application of any principle of generation, however, can lead to problems where questions of ethics are concerned. I am going to show this in an example here because these considerations play an important role in my own account, as I shall explain in Part III.

In Erich Kästner’s fantastic children’s book *The Thirty-fifth of May*, for instance, the daughter of South Sea chief and a Dutch typist is depicted as black- and white-chequered (to the protagonist’s delighted surprise). The work of fiction, first published in 1931, invites the reader to laugh about this, for two reasons: the mixing of races is represented as creative and wonderful, and the episode makes subversive fun of the Nazi ideology of racial purity. A modern day politically correct reader – eager to spot the slighting of minority groups – might find it problematic to imagine it as fictional that situations involving mixed race people are funny. Can a reader who has this problem generate fictional truths about the text?

In this case, the MBP does not help: even if the reader accepts the proposition that Kästner’s society appreciated the joke about a mixed-race person, she cannot accept that it should be funny. The modern reader feels a reluctance to imagine that fictionally, it is right to laugh about people of mixed race. If she were to imagine it, she would – albeit fictionally – adopt a moral viewpoint that is odious to her. This dilemma is known as the ‘problem of imaginative resistance’.²⁵⁴

Walton argues that in cases like this, different reader reactions are possible.²⁵⁵ A reader might refuse to accept it as fictional within *The Thirty-fifth of May* that the fact of being of mixed-race is funny. She could turn a blind eye to it, thus avoiding the problem of accepting as fictional what she does not accept in real life.

If she manages to accept it as fictional, she might also imagine it, accompanied by a feeling of guilt.

²⁵² This strategy is common in sensational fiction or comics, when the author omits the description of a particularly gruesome scene and leaves it to the reader’s imagination to picture it, e. g. the way a murder was committed. As Scott McCloud says: ‘To kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths.’ (McCloud 1993, 69).

²⁵³ Walton 1990, 184.

²⁵⁴ Gendler 2010, 180.

²⁵⁵ Walton 2008, 56.

As a third possibility, she might accept it as fictional but refuse to imagine it. This leaves her two courses of action: either she could reject the story completely, or she could follow a convention which holds that we are not obliged to imagine things that are morally repulsive to us,²⁵⁶ and decide to skip imagining this particular bit of the story.

Fictional worlds

The discussion about the generation of fictional truths highlights an important aspect of fiction reading: it is necessary to distinguish between the fictional world suggested by the work of fiction, the ‘work world’, and the world imagined by the reader in her engagement with the work of fiction, the ‘game world’.²⁵⁷

The game world contains many fictional truths that were prompted by the reader’s own associations and may thus be quite different from the author’s work, or the fictional world that is manifested in the work of fiction according to contemporary literary judgment. Every reader, and every author, creates her own appreciator’s world when engaging with a work of fiction. The work world, on the other hand, contains the fictional truths that an ideal reader of the work of fiction would generate.²⁵⁸ If the distinction between the work world and the appreciator’s world were not made, it would not be possible to account for the wide range of different responses that readers have to works of fiction.²⁵⁹

Participating in a work of fiction

As mentioned above, Walton calls the engagement with the fictional world suggested by the work of fiction the ‘authorized game’ if it follows the rules of generation for fictional truths that are generally accepted for this kind of work.²⁶⁰ The reader can deviate from the authorized game in two different ways: she can play a game that is not

²⁵⁶ Walton 1990, 155.

Modern-day schools and publishers have found a third solution: Passages in works of fiction that might be offensive to politically correct or supposedly vulnerable readers are deleted or rewritten, to the effect that the original work of fiction is lost to the modern reader.

²⁵⁷ Walton 1990, 58.

²⁵⁸ Walton 1990, 59. A discussion of how an ideal reader of a work of fiction could be defined would be interesting, but it is beyond the scope of this project.

²⁵⁹ Walton 1990, 59.

²⁶⁰ Walton 1990, 398.

authorized, or she can play the authorized game, but have either imaginings in addition to the game, or fail to imagine some key propositions authorized by the game. If a reader engages with *The End of the Affair* under the assumption that it is a guide to London restaurants, she plays an unauthorized game. If, on the other hand, she reads it as a psychological novel but during the reading process also indulges in ponderings about her own failures as a Catholic, she plays the authorized game, although the additional imaginings – albeit triggered by the novel and the protagonists’ conflicts with their faith – are not part of this game.²⁶¹

The phenomenon of imaginings that occur alongside the authorized game often arises when the reader is involved in psychological participation, imagining a character(f) from inside. What happens to a reader when she is ‘caught up in a story’?

As Walton points out, we frequently have the illusion that fictional things are objects of our psychological attitudes, that fictionality is a species of the truth, although we know better.²⁶² There is a link between the real world and the fictional world, and this link is manifested by the reader’s participation in a work of fiction. Walton says about our engagement with characters(f) that we are ‘sharing their joys and sorrows, rejoicing and commiserating with them, admiring and detesting them.’²⁶³ Reading *The End of the Affair*, for instance, we know that it is merely fictional that Sarah gives up her love affair with Maurice because of a promise she made to God, but we still feel sorry because of her loss and her wasted life. We do not actually feel sorry for Sarah, because – as we know – Sarah does not exist, it is only fictional that she does. Statements about fictional entities do not refer to anything, it is only fictional that they do. But when we imagine that Sarah exists, we may feel sympathy with the imagined Sarah, and thus, experience an emotion that is very much like sorrow for a real person who is close to us. This emotion is – contrary to emotions in real life – cut off from action. If Sarah was a real person, and my friend in real life, I might visit her, give her a hug, send her to see a counsellor. But as I only feel for her as part of my participation in a novel, I am limited to experiencing sadness. I might even imagine Sarah from the inside and feel regret about a love lost and a life not fully lived. In real life, this might urge me to change my life plan, but in fiction, I just savour the emotion.

²⁶¹ I am going to distinguish between authorized imaginings (work world) and non-authorized imaginings that are nonetheless tied to the work (game world). There is a fuzzy area where non-authorized imaginings are only associations triggered by, but not tied to the work; I am not going to investigate this in my thesis.

²⁶² Walton 1990, 205.

²⁶³ Walton 1990, 273.

Walton says that it is fictional that we feel for fictional characters. We have the impression that we care about characters(f), but it is only fictional that we do. We do, however, have real emotions that are triggered by fictionally caring. To clarify his view, he coins the term ‘quasi-emotion’. For him, a quasi-emotion contains all the elements of an emotion except the cognitive element and the motivational element.²⁶⁴ Emotions generated by real-life situations are based on a belief that something is the case which prompts not only a quasi-emotion but also certain motivations. Emotions generated by engagement with a work of fiction, on the other hand, are based on make-believe that something is the case which prompts a quasi-emotion. Hence, the quasi-emotions generated by make-believe in fiction reading do not prompt us to action, the feelings and sensations may have a different intensity, and their duration can be different, either longer or shorter.

Here is an example of quasi-worry in fiction reading to clarify this distinction: In *Pincher Martin*, the ship-wrecked protagonist tries to haul himself up a rock. When I read ‘A ripple splashed into his mouth. Immediately he was convulsed and struggling’,²⁶⁵ I find myself sitting tense and clenching my fists, worrying and wanting him to climb out of the water. On the one hand, I am inclined to say that my worry is like an emotion felt in the real world because my phenomenological sensations and my state of mind suggest that I experience worry. On the other hand, the worry I go through while reading *Pincher Martin* is different from the worry I would feel if I actually watched someone in real life who was in danger of drowning. The worry that is brought about by my game of make-believe with *Pincher Martin* is less intense, and it does not incite me to act, as a real life worry about a drowning man would. Hence, in Walton’s view, I have a quasi-worry that is based on make-believe that Pincher Martin is drowning.

Emotions that are brought about by participation in a work of fiction often have a longer time span than those brought about by engagement in a real life event.²⁶⁶ If I were to watch somebody in danger of drowning in real life, my worry about him would end as soon as he was either saved or drowned. My worry about Pincher Martin,

²⁶⁴ Walton 1990, 196.

²⁶⁵ Golding 1956, 42.

²⁶⁶ Walton 1990, 199.

however, is not limited to the question of his survival; it is deepened by the work's vivid presentation of how a life-threatening situation can affect a human being. For this reason, it has been troubling me off and on ever since I first read the novel twenty years ago.

Walton says that although the mental life we lead in reality is distinct from the mental life we lead in a participant's game of fiction reading, there is a large overlap.²⁶⁷ We carry likes, dislikes, and dispositions into the reading process, thus influencing both the fictional truths we generate and the emotions that arise from them. And this works the other way around as well: emotions generated through fiction reading can change our real lives. For instance, if a reader already has a fear of swimming in the sea before starting to read *Pincher Martin*, the worry induced by reading the novel might deepen that fear in reality.

Identifying with a character(f)

The experience of emotions brought about by fiction reading is closely linked to the process of 'identifying with a character from within'. As Walton says, 'We don't observe fictional worlds from without. We live in them (in the worlds of our games, not work worlds)'.²⁶⁸ When I identify with a character(f), I imagine myself in that fictional role. For instance, when I read about Maurice meeting Sarah's husband in *The End of the Affair*, it is fictional that Maurice is betrayed by Sarah and jealous of her husband. The features of the novel prompt me to imagine what it might be like to be in Maurice's place. If I manage to feel empathy with Maurice, the pattern of my thoughts is shaped by my motivation to simulate his situation.²⁶⁹

This is possible for me, although I am unlike the fictional Maurice in many aspects, because feelings of betrayal and jealousy are deeply human and known to all of us. So my emotions can be evoked by a simulation of a fictional person, based on my own experiences. My response does not only involve the reactions mandated by the novel, but may also induce other thoughts in me: how would I have reacted in Maurice's place, is he right to be so bitter, shouldn't he have forced an explanation from Sarah? Imaginings of this kind do not belong to the work's authorized game but 'occur

²⁶⁷ Walton 1990, 252.

²⁶⁸ Walton 1990, 273.

²⁶⁹ Feagin 1988, 496.

along with it'.²⁷⁰ They give us the opportunity to try out roles and patterns of behaviour which we do not have in real life, without being troubled by our current personal concerns.²⁷¹ These imaginings enable us to feel empathy with people whose outlook on life is different from our own, and to reflect on our own life in consequence.

Walton says that the insights we gain in this way give us pleasure, that we care about the experience of fictionally caring,²⁷² but he does not investigate the reasons why this could be the case. He merely assumes that there might be an evolutionary explanation for the fact that human beings enjoy experiences that produce insight.²⁷³ What remains to be done in this area, Walton concludes, is to investigate the various ways in which participatory experiences make a contribution to our lives.²⁷⁴

In this section, I gave a brief overview of Walton's theory of representation in regard to fiction reading. Here is a summary of the most important terms he uses in his own words:

Representations [...] are things possessing the social function of serving as props in games of make-believe, although they also prompt imaginings and are sometimes *objects* in them as well. A prop is something which, by virtue of conditional *principles of generation*, mandates imaginings. Propositions whose imaginings are mandated are *fictional*, and the fact that a given proposition is fictional is a *fictional truth*. *Fictional worlds* are associated with collections of fictional truths; what is fictional in a given world – the work of game of make-believe, for example, or that of a representational work of art.²⁷⁵

Walton says there is room for further investigation on how participating in a work of fiction has an influence on our lives. I shall focus on this question in chapter 9 where I compare Walton's and Ricoeur's account of fiction reading and investigate how Walton's account can be filled out in this respect.

²⁷⁰ Walton 1990, 255.

²⁷¹ Walton 1990, 237.

²⁷² Walton 1990, 271.

²⁷³ Walton 1990, 272.

²⁷⁴ Walton 1990, 273.

²⁷⁵ Walton 1990, 69.

3.2 *Criticism of Walton's model and open points*

In this section, I am going to address two specific questions that have been raised by Walton's critics in regard to the role of the fiction reader. It is not in the scope of my work to explicitly defend Walton against objections to his account; rather, for the purposes of this discussion, I am assuming that Walton's account is correct. In particular, I am going to take his idea of 'imagining from the inside' for granted. I have chosen to examine specific points of criticism of Walton's account here because they are important for the discussion of my own account, in particular regarding the quality of the reading experience, the process of making-believe, and the generation of emotions through fiction reading.

In my own account, I am going to focus on a reader's empathy with a character(f), so the questions I am going to raise in this section prepare the ground for my discussions in Part III. These are the questions raised by Walton's critics: Does the analogy to games of make-believe reflect the individual experience of a reader? Does the analogy to games of make-believe cover every aspect of what we value in literature? I am going to limit my discussion to the points put forward on these two questions by Noël Carroll and John Gibson because their arguments highlight the issues I am going to investigate further in the next chapter.

Do fiction readers feel they are playing a game?

For Carroll, this question is important. He claims that when a reader engages with a work of fiction, she is not aware of playing a game of make-believe, or of following any rules prescribed by such a game. In Carroll's words, Walton attributes 'too much role-playing of a very strained variety' to fiction readers.²⁷⁶

On close examination, however, it becomes apparent that Carroll mainly objects to the use of the term 'role-playing' on a linguistic level, not against the activities which Walton associates with role-playing. Linguistic custom makes us call the process of engaging with a work of fiction 'reading'; the use of the term 'game of make-believe' for this is unusual. But here we only have a case of a novel use of a term, not of a different kind of personal experience. For Carroll, fictions invite a reader to

²⁷⁶ Carroll 1995, 98.

entertain certain propositions as unasserted, that is: to imagine them. So far, his view does not differ very much from Walton's: they both agree that fictions mandate the reader to imagine something. But what does the process of imagination entail?

For Carroll, imagining something is to 'entertain' a proposition. He says that the concept of role-playing is not necessary to explain the reading process.

This is where he runs into problems. Taking this stance, he avoids facing the problem of how the reader comes to entertain some propositions rather than others (Walton's rules of generation), and he does not give sufficient weight to one of the main aspects of participation in a work of fiction: identification with a character(f) 'from within'. Imagination gives a reader scope to get emotionally involved, thus paying more attention to some aspects of the work than to others. For instance, if a reader feels empathy for Maurice in *The End of the Affair*, she is playing a role, imagining herself in a situation of being left by someone she loves, she not merely entertaining the proposition that Maurice is hurt because he was left by Sarah. The empathetic reader tries to simulate Maurice's situation in her mind, using her own experiences and her own observations of the world to fill out the picture. This simulation process is best described by Walton's concept of role-playing because this indicates that by participating in a work of fiction the reader simulates a person in a certain situation. This simulation process is not explained by Carroll's notion of entertaining a proposition as unasserted.

The problem with Carroll's account is that it precludes a deeper discussion of the role of the reader. This is because Carroll takes fictional propositions as merely unasserted, as opposed to simulated. If fictional propositions were nothing more than unasserted propositions, it would remain mysterious why they can provoke an **emotional reaction** in the reader. I am going to discuss this in detail in Part III.

Does the concept of make-believe explain why we value fiction reading?

The second objection to Walton's model is that the notion of fiction reading as make-believe does not cover everything that we think is important for us when we read fiction. Gibson claims that a make-believe theory represents fiction as nothing more than 'fodder for fantasy'.²⁷⁷ If we see fiction like that, Gibson says, we under-estimate

²⁷⁷ Gibson 2008, 172.

the ‘critical and cognitive force of literature’.²⁷⁸ For him, literature bridges the gap between the mind of the reader and the reality of the world by linking the reader’s beliefs and concepts to something outside them: the forms of human activities going on in the world. Gibson says that our existing concepts are acknowledged and fulfilled through the insights we gain in fiction reading.

He sees a problem here for make-believe models of fiction reading because for him, the vocabulary of make-believe does not account for the true insights into the world that we gain through literature. If we only imagined scenarios, he claims, we would not be able to ‘*see* reality in the fictional worlds of literary texts’.²⁷⁹ He says that make-believe models do not cover the whole scope of what he calls ‘literary humanism’, the conviction that participating in a work of fiction can illuminate reality for the reader. What we would fail to recognize, he adds, is not only the truth about human behaviour but also the validity of the world-adequate content of a work of fiction.²⁸⁰ He does not say that modelling fiction reading as a game of make-believe excludes the workings of literary humanism, but he insists that this kind of model does not explain how fiction readers come to achieve a richer understanding of reality.

This is an interesting objection because it leads into the discussion of what ‘making-believe’ actually entails, especially in fiction reading. As a counter-argument to Gibson, I hold that he underestimates the complexity of the make-believe process. Imagining something means simulating a situation in which a proposition is true although we do not believe it is true. In order to be able to simulate such a situation, however, we need a backdrop of other propositions which we do believe to be true: that London existed in the 1940s, that it was bombed during the Second World War, that lovers are often jealous, that religious belief can make people do strange things, and so on. Make-believe has to operate on elements of our beliefs, and this is why it is interesting to us. If someone told us to imagine that crylophants are crylomarcic, for instance, we would not be able to do it because we have no beliefs connected with anything that might be represented by the words ‘crylophant’ or ‘crylomarcic’.

Making-believe is not equivalent to idle flights of fancy that are triggered by chance. In Part III, I am going to argue that in order to ‘make herself believe’ that

²⁷⁸ Gibson 2008, 173.

²⁷⁹ Gibson 2008, 172.

²⁸⁰ Gibson 2008, 165.

something is fictional a reader has to actively search for associations within her memories of experiences and images of the world.

Another objection to Gibson's claim is that – contrary to what he claims – we cannot rely on works of fiction to give us knowledge about what the activities and emotions of other humans are really like. All we get is an extended knowledge about the many ways that human behaviour might be like, and the experience of pondering on human behaviour. We play with the examples of human psychology shown to us in fiction, linking them to our existing concepts, thus changing them or creating new ones. When we read *The End of the Affair*, we do not get a textbook truth about male jealousy; we only get a plausible example. There cannot be a direct knowledge transfer about human behaviour between the work of fiction and the fiction reader. We see samples of good and credible mimesis, but not 'reality'. The information can even be misleading, although intuitively convincing. As critics have pointed out, for example, autistic Christopher in Mark Haddon's *The Strange Behaviour of the Dog in the Night-Time* is made up from many stereotypes – as a result, Christopher does not possess the abilities of a real autistic person, but those of a lovable fiction who plays a successful role in the narrative.²⁸¹ We do not gain knowledge about autism or Asperger's syndrome here, we only see a representation of some interesting aspects which may or may not be true.

This is why I hold that Gibson is mistaken in his claims: He under-estimates the make-believe process, and he mischaracterises the nature of the knowledge we gain from fiction. In my view, we can advance our knowledge from fiction reading in two ways: by gaining possible insights which we need to verify with reliable sources, and by actively reflecting on human behaviour.

In this section, I addressed two questions that were raised by Walton's critics, both connected with the role of the reader in Walton's account of fiction reading as a game of make-believe.

I discussed Carroll's claim that the analogy to games of make-believe does not reflect the individual experience of a reader, and found that Carroll does not attach enough importance to the role of the reader in the process. In my view, making-believe

²⁸¹ See for instance Loftis 2015, 124: 'Christopher's character is a conglomeration of stereotypes, presenting autism as the public eye would imagine it to be: his character is more consistent in sticking to general perceptions of the spectrum than any real individual person could be, resulting in a figure who is overdrawn to the point of potential caricature.'

a fictional story involves the reader's own experiential memories, and thus, the simulation of the story goes a long way beyond Carroll's notion of entertaining a proposition.

I also investigated Gibson's assertion that the make-believe analogy for fiction reading does not cover the recognition of reality in literature, and came to the conclusion that Gibson's understanding of the process of make-believe falls short of what is actually involved. Making-believe a fictional story is not arbitrary – the reader has to find associations for the work of fiction within her own life story and experience.

Here, it was not my intention to defend Walton's account against criticism. I explored these critical points because they pave the way to the exposition of my own view of the reading process. These discussions are important for the explanation of my own account of fiction reading in connection with narrative identity in Part III. In my own account, I am going to fill a gap left by Walton's account: the role of the reader's experiential memories during the reading process, and the subsequent generation of real-life emotions that may persist after the reading process.

PART III: THE SIMULATED SELF

4 The Simulated Self

How do participating in a work of fiction and imagining a fictional world intertwine with the reader's life? Building on Ricoeur's account of narrative identity and Walton's account of fiction reading as make-believe, I am going to investigate two aspects of this question: the actual reading process and the subsequent self-reflection that is set in motion by fiction reading. Based on my discoveries, I shall propose a theory of the effects of fiction reading on the reader's self. I shall show that my theory fills two gaps in Ricoeur's account of reader engagement with fiction: how emotions can be generated in fiction reading, and how experiential memories can influence the reading process. I am also going to offer an answer to a question left open by Walton's theory of fiction reading: how fiction reading can contribute to the reader's own life.

Here, I explore a topic that has not been examined in depth by other philosophical accounts of narrative identity or of fiction reading: the mutual influence of fiction reading and the fiction reader's narrative identity. I show how the reading process intertwines with the reader's self through the medium of narrative, both during and after the reading process. Thus, my theory enhances the explanatory power of the narrative identity account in a substantial way.

A large portion of my work is concerned with the role and the nature of the fiction reader's emotions, in particular with the **emotional experience**. I commit myself to a definition of emotion as a complex process that has a narrative structure. In chapter 5, I shall outline the account of emotion that I adopt.

I shall present my own account in chapters 6 and 7, leaving comparisons and contrasts until chapter 8.

In chapter 6, I shall investigate the actual reading process. Section 6.1 deals with the degrees of involvement the reader can attain during this activity. I distinguish between three levels of participation: 1) reading 'from the outside' with aesthetic appreciation, 2) participation that includes sympathy with a character(f), 3) participation that includes identifying and empathizing with a character(f) from within. I say that it is possible for reader participation to occur on all three levels.

I am not making a general claim about reader participation. Every reader is different, and some readers may never experience sympathy or empathy with a character(f). The aim of my investigation is to provide a model that accommodates the effects of fiction reading that have been observed in socio-psychological and cognitive research. My assumption is that these apply in some, though not all, cases.

In section 6.2, I define three different kinds of narrative that the fiction reader can develop during the reading process: the other-narrative, the self-in-other-narrative, and the other-in-self-narrative. I shall argue that the generation of these narratives is brought about by a psychological mechanism which I call the ‘**doppelgänger function**’. I am going to explain the working of the doppelgänger function with some examples from fiction.

My main focus during this and the following discussions is going to be on the reader who identifies with a character(f) from within.

In chapter 7, I am going to investigate the long-lasting effects that fiction reading can have on the reader. What can cause the reader to continue her engagement with a fictional story after the reading process has been completed? I am going to argue that a chain of emotions can evoke both spontaneous and purposeful self-reflection, and that self-reflection can trigger refiguration of the reader’s self-narrative.

Finally, I shall summarize the differences between my own account and the two accounts that constitute its basis. In chapter 8, I am going to highlight two gaps in Ricoeur’s account of the connection between fiction reading and narrative identity, and show how my account helps to fill them. In addition to that, I shall discuss how Ricoeur’s concept of the configuration of the self-narrative through three steps of mimesis can be connected with Walton’s account of fiction reading as a game of make believe. Can the concept of make-believe, as described by Walton, be applied to any stage of Ricoeur’s mimesis process? I shall argue that the concept of make-believe is deeply involved in Ricoeur’s third stage of mimesis, and that Walton’s concept of appreciation with participation corresponds to Ricoeur’s concept of identifying with a character from within in an important respect: both Ricoeur and Walton say that the reader creates fictional truths about herself during her engagement with a work of fiction.

In chapter 9, I shall provide additional support for two areas of Walton’s account of fiction reading: my account of the different levels of narrative woven by the reader, based on Ricoeur’s model of the narrative self, shows how deep emotions can

evolve and persist after reading, even if the reading process is understood as ‘only’ a game of make-believe. I shall argue that in order to understand the fiction reader’s engagement with the text, it is important to investigate the imaginings that occur alongside the ‘authorized’ game of make-believe. As a second point, I shall claim that Ricoeur’s account of self-reflection and subsequent self-refiguration is needed, with a refinement added by my own account, to supplement Walton’s account by showing how fiction reading can influence a reader’s self-narrative.

More recent investigations of the influence of fiction reading on the reader tend to focus on one of two things: first, on the instruments used in works of fiction with the aim of influencing the reader, or, second, on empirical research of the readers’ reaction regarding empathy and ethics. As I shall explain in chapter 6, these enquiries have given me valuable suggestions for the direction of my investigations. In particular, socio-psychological studies have confirmed my idea that the influence of fiction reading on the reader’s self-assessment is a topic that is worth exploring in connection with the concept of narrative identity. However, these accounts rarely tackle questions about the structure of the reader’s fiction-induced emotions and their possible impact on the reader’s self. Where they do, I have integrated a short discussion in the relevant chapters, in particular in sections 6.2, 7.1 and 7.2.

5 Emotion as a structured experience

In this chapter, I shall outline the main points of the account of emotion that I am going to assume in my investigations of the effects of fiction reading on the reader. I shall argue that engagement with a work of fiction with participation develops in a similar way to an emotional experience that is directed towards a person in real life.

My account is based on the assumption that fiction reading usually involves getting to know fictional people, hence it is important to investigate the causes and effects of emotions in this context. I am following Goldie's view that when an emotional response carries on over a medium or long-term time range, the evolving **emotional episode** can expand into a complex narrative.²⁸² Hence, whenever I use the term 'emotion' here and in the following chapters, I am going to refer to a complete emotional episode.²⁸³ In a nutshell, I shall view an emotion as a characteristically complex process which cannot be fully explained without taking into consideration the complete context in which it occurs. An emotion is paradigmatically embedded in the unfolding narrative of a person's life. Thus, emotions play a big part in the refiguration of one's narrative identity. In the next two chapters, I am going to explore the interplay between fiction reading, emotions, experiential memories, and the development of narrative identity.

I hold that emotions are often long-lasting processes which are shaped by past and present emotional experiences as well as dispositions to think, act, and feel. The elements of such a long-lasting emotion are interwoven in a dynamic narrative which makes these elements intelligible by providing a context. For instance, I may be sad when I am passed over for a promotion, but my sadness can turn into anger when I learn that a colleague whom I judge to be less qualified is promoted in my place. An emotion is typically intentional, and the intentional **target of an emotion** can be different from the cause of the emotion. As an emotional experience unfolds, it can spawn new threads of emotion with new targets which inherit some of the original target's attributes.²⁸⁴

²⁸² See Goldie 2000, 11.

²⁸³ There are different views about the duration of an emotion or an emotional episode, but this is just a terminological issue that makes no difference to my argument. There is a prevalent agreement among philosophers that emotions either are or occur as part of a broad, complex response. For a detailed discussion and a literature overview, see Price 2012, 58-60.

²⁸⁴ I shall discuss this in detail in the course of this chapter.

In the following discussion, I am going to use emotion-related terms in the following way:

- When I use the term ‘emotion’ what I have in mind is the typically complex process that constitutes an emotional episode.
- An emotional episode is a continued emotional response, triggered by an emotional reaction, and united by being about the same theme.
- The target of an emotion is a special case of an intentional object, namely the thing, person or event that an emotion is directed to. For example, if I am afraid of being killed by a bull that is charging towards me, the target of my fear is the bull.
- The focus of an emotion is the background object or state of affairs that constitutes its main underlying concern.²⁸⁵ In the case of the charging bull, the focus of my emotion is my health.
- An **emotional disposition** is the tendency to react with a certain emotion under certain conditions.
- An emotional reaction is a short-term emotional response, which might last for a few seconds or a few minutes.
- An emotional experience is the combined phenomenological feeling (including bodily sensations as well as psychological feelings) generated in the course of an emotional reaction or an emotional episode.²⁸⁶

Emotion as a complex process

In a multifaceted structure, an emotion merges evaluation, psychological and bodily feelings and responses into an intertwined phenomenological experience which feeds upon itself. The target of the emotion becomes the focus of increased attention. As Michael Brady says, emotions help us make important things salient to us, they capture our attention.²⁸⁷

For example, I feel compassion for the fugitives from Syria who flee to Europe when I watch the scenes of long treks with sick and hungry families in the news, but my emotion does not stop there. I have become sensitive to the target of my emotion,

²⁸⁵ Helm 2009, 251.

²⁸⁶ Price 2015, 82.

²⁸⁷ Brady 2013, 16.

gathering up more information without being consciously aware of it: I read newspaper articles about the situation more carefully, I read the hysterical postings on Facebook, and I am snowed under with conflicting information and conflicting feelings which are now directed at the commentators. I am in turn feeling guilty about not offering help, disgusted at reporters exploiting the fugitives' problems for their own stories and at the blind activism of do-gooders, then remorseful about not doing more for people who are in need. Thus, the development of my emotion about the fugitives includes the generation of emotional reactions about others (in this case repulsion against journalists) and about myself (remorse about not being a more caring person). Together, these reactions form a complex emotional experience. As they are connected, and have a unified strong influence on me by causing me to reflect on myself, I think it is right to see all of these instances as belonging to the same emotion.²⁸⁸

The duration of an emotional experience is largely dependent on the type of emotion, in various ways. For instance, a self-directed emotional experience is likely to have more facets and a more intricate structure than an other-directed emotional experience because it has more and richer material to feed upon. A negative emotional experience typically has a stronger impact than a positive emotional experience; empirical evidence has shown that the focus of a negative emotion is usually narrower, and thus deeper, than that of a positive emotion, provided that these emotions have the same intensity.²⁸⁹ I shall return to these thoughts in chapter 7.

The role of narrative

An emotion is intertwined with the narrative of a person's life, with her **moods** and dispositions, the past and present events in her life, and her past and present experiences and emotions.²⁹⁰ To make sense of an emotion and its connected emotional episodes, it is therefore necessary to appeal to this narrative. How does that work? I argue that having an emotion motivates me to focus on a particular problem, and to re-evaluate my

²⁸⁸ By 'the same emotion' I mean the same token, the currently experienced emotion.

²⁸⁹ This line of thought is supported by many studies, recent papers are for instance: Fredrickson / Branigan 2005, 'Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires', *Cognition and Emotion* 19, Vol. 3 2005, 313-332; Barclay / Kiefer, 'Approach or Avoid? Exploring Overall Justice and the Differential Effects of Positive and Negative Emotions', *Journal of Management* Vol. 40 No. 7, 2014, 1857-1898.

²⁹⁰ See Goldie 2012, 61 and Goldie 2000, 5.

life story in the parts that seem to be related to the problem area, and to question the ways I dealt with this problem in the past.

If I try to make sense of an emotional episode that I undergo, I examine my current self-narrative and look for features that relate to the emotion I am investigating. Here, the success of my search depends on the reliability of my self-narrative.²⁹¹ For instance, when I try to find out why my catty colleague makes me so angry, I might remember that in my childhood, I was repeatedly blamed for my siblings' misbehaviour, but never received any credit when I helped them to succeed at something. So I realize that I added up isolated events in my past life to the general impression that I am always put-upon, and tend to get angry about this in a way that I now see as inappropriate. If, however, my self-narrative tells me that I have always been an exceptionally talented career woman who has repeatedly been insulted by jealous colleagues, I might come to the view that I have a right to be angry.

In comparison to understanding one's own emotions, understanding the emotions of others requires an additional effort of imagination, and additional life experience. I try to piece together the evidence (my knowledge of the other person's character and history, her facial and bodily expression, my knowledge of emotional concepts) and deduce which object her emotion is directed towards, and what she is feeling. Doing this, I access the other-narrative that I have constructed for her. The process is similar when I try to understand the emotions of a character(f): there, I also create an other-narrative. However, the props I can use in each case have different sources. For the creation of the other-narrative of a real person, I can use and deepen my personal knowledge of them, using all of the information available to me via my ongoing connection with the real world. Building the other-narrative of a fictional person, I must rely on the information given by the text, but I often have the benefit of having the thoughts of the fictional person spelt out to me, which is not (yet?) possible in real life. The other-narratives that a person creates for other persons in real life and the other-narratives that a reader creates for a character(f) have the same structure, but they differ in their function. Whereas the real-life other-narrative helps me to understand the other person so that I can interact with her in the way I think appropriate, the other-narrative for a fictional person helps me to feel for her from the inside with the

²⁹¹ Goldie 2012, 151.

aim of actually savouring the experience of perceiving the world from the perspective of an other.²⁹²

Regarding the reader's activities during the reading process, I shall define the concepts of other-narrative, self-narrative, self-in-other-narrative and other-in-self-narrative in chapter 6, and discuss the connections between them using representative examples from literature.

The intentionality of an emotion

An emotion is characteristically directed towards a target. The target of an emotion can be a thing, a person, an event, a state of affairs, or even a theoretical concept or a fictional entity.²⁹³ I can hate war, admire time travel, love Father Christmas, or despise Beavis and Butt-Head, for example.²⁹⁴

In most cases, it is easy to identify the target of an emotion. If I see a bull charging towards me from a short distance, my initial intuitive evaluation identifies the most important part of the situation: I am in danger, and my emotional reaction is fear. The target of this fear is the bull which is about to kill me within the next few seconds, and I am urged to immediate action, in this case to run for cover. This is accompanied by a bodily reaction: my muscles tense and my heart beats faster as I see the beast approaching. I experience the target of my emotion as bound up with the phenomenological part of my emotion, which is made up of psychological feeling and bodily sensations.

There are, however, cases where it is not clear to me what the target of my emotion really is. Being confused about the target of one's emotion may have three causes: first, merging of 'historical' emotions with new ones; second, finding in retrospect that the cause of the emotion was based on false beliefs; and third, finding in retrospect that although the cause of the emotion was appropriate for an emotion of this kind, the intensity of the resulting emotion was out of proportion. I am going to present an example for the first of these cases, as I am going to refer to it in chapter 6 when I investigate the reader's role when engaged with a work of fiction.

²⁹² Goldie 2000, 181.

²⁹³ Regarding the problem of „feeling“ for a fictional character, see Walton 1990, 196, and the discussion in section 2.1 of my work. Emotions generated by engagement with a work of fiction are based on 'make-believe that something is the case'.

²⁹⁴ I am aware of the debate about the existence of fictional characters, but am not going to go into it here because it has no bearing on my project.

The first case, the ‘merging’ situation, can occur if my feelings were aroused by an event at some point in my personal history, and were never resolved. A typical instance of this is distress experienced in childhood. For example, I feel my blood pressure rising when my boss does not appreciate my work, and psychologically, I feel ill-used. In my consciousness, I have the impression that my extreme anger is directed towards my boss. This may be true, but it does not actually need to be the case – for instance, I may have been in an emotionally fragile state already before the incident with my boss. If I have a childhood trauma because my father always blamed me when something bad happened, while finding good excuses for my siblings, I already have a strong emotional disposition to feel unjustly treated which flares up at the slightest incident which fits into the same pattern. As a result, the anger I feel for my boss seems out of proportion – it also bears the weight of the childhood anger I still feel for my father. In this case, one could say that my anger is directed towards my father, who is wearing the mask of my boss.

The context of the situation, created by my boss’s face in front of me in connection with the phenomenological experience which is part of my emotion, can mislead me about the target of the emotion – regardless of whether bodily feelings were involved or not. In my encounter with my boss, I have the impression that my boss is the target of my anger, although my anger was actually caused by two independent events that each have their own stories: the unjust censoring exercised by my father in my childhood, and the negative feedback of my boss in the present. As the second emotional reaction, that to my boss, is currently happening to me, it appears to bring about the complete unpleasant phenomenological experience and direct it towards my boss. The focus of my first emotional reaction (being treated unfairly by my father) slides over into the focus of my second emotional reaction (being treated unfairly on purpose by my boss) without a noticeable hitch. I am not aware at that moment that my boss and my father have morphed into a single hateful object.

In such a case, phenomenology (in this case the angry feeling) is borrowed, or rather shared, between different narratives. We know what triggered them, and we know which target belongs to which emotion, but we are no longer consciously aware of it while engaged in the experience. Blustering against my boss who makes critical remarks about my work seems natural at the time. Afterwards, however, I realize that I became over-excited, and I start to wonder why. If the merging of an existing emotional disposition, or a previous emotion, with a current emotion is strong – because the

previous emotion was strong – this enhances the subsequent need for reflection and ‘untangling’ the stories, thereby re-assessing them.

I am going to discuss this confusion of feeling towards an object’s characteristics and feeling towards an object in the following chapters about fiction reading. In particular, I am going to examine the merging of emotions which are directed at a character(f) and emotions which are directed at the reader’s self.

The development of an emotional experience

When we have an emotional experience, our feelings are directed towards the target of the emotion. This is, however, not a one-sided transfer: as a consequence of the feeling, our perception of the object becomes more discerning in a way that is likely to enhance its emotional impact. The longer the emotional experience lasts, the more intense is it likely to become. The emotion tends to return to its object, feeding both on the object and on itself. During this ‘feeding’ process, we are stimulated to gather information about the object that is in keeping with the nature of the emotion as it started out. For instance, if a boy falls in love with a girl, he is bound to notice all of her features that can enhance love and admiration, like beautiful hair, bright eyes, or a gentle nature. His emotion motivates him to discover more about her, and he uses his imagination as a tool to find out more possible aspects of her. Finally, the information-feeding becomes an experience in its own right, which can trigger new emotions with new targets. The boy might be ashamed of spending all of his free time investigating the life of a girl; or he might be proud that for the first time in his life, he has the stamina to investigate something at greater depth.

In section 6.1, I am going to argue that the engagement with a work of fiction with participation works in a similar way to the development of an emotional experience that is directed towards a person in real life. My investigations are based on the assumption that fiction reading typically involves getting to know fictional people. When I read a work of fiction, I gather information about characters(f) who are drawn as either human or anthropomorphous in some respect. Even if there are no characters(f) in the story that is told, there is always an implied author whose point of view gives us glimpses of his fictional persona. It is important here to distinguish between the implied author and the implied narrator of a work of fiction: An implied narrator is part of the work of fiction (regardless of whether or not he takes an active part in the action), but

the implied author is always outside of the story. The real author constructs the implied author by her choices of language, imagery, and topics, either intentionally or unintentionally. The reader recognizes that there is an implied author and creates her own version of this hypothetical person while reading the text, evaluating the author's choices of language, presentation and subject matter. I am going to discuss this in more detail in chapter 6 when I examine levels of reader participation.

Sometimes, I am moved by what I learn about characters(f). Being moved motivates me to imagine more about them, based on the information given in the work of fiction. I imagine what the fictional characters' feelings might be like, from the outside and from the inside, getting emotionally involved in a way which is often not clear to me while I am reading. This is what I am going to investigate in the following chapters.

6 Within the reading process

6.1 *Levels of participation*

In this section, I shall examine the engagement of a reader with a work of fiction under three aspects. First, I am going to investigate the kinds of attitude a fiction reader can have towards a work of fiction. As a second point, I shall evaluate how these levels of reader involvement interweave and influence the reading experience. Third, I am going to explain my definitions by applying them to a possible reading experiences of works of fiction, especially of John Williams' novel *Stoner*²⁹⁵.

The participation levels I use are similar to the ones Walton defines. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Walton differentiates between appreciation without psychological participation and appreciation with psychological participation. For him, fiction reading typically involves both kinds of appreciation. He says that 'we don't just observe fictional worlds from without. We live in them'.²⁹⁶

I do not assume that every reader is able to attain all conceivable levels of participation, or that every work of fiction is capable of provoking all levels of reader participation. My model of fiction reading explores the possible forms of engagement that a reader can have with a work of fiction, with a special focus on reader empathy.

As my focus is going to be the interaction of a reader with a character(f), I separate the appreciation with participation into two parts. I shall distinguish between three levels of engagement: appreciative (in the sense of aesthetic appreciation of the way characters(f) are represented), sympathetic (from a third person point of view), or empathetic (from a first person point of view).

Why focus on fictional characters?

Why can the attitude of the reader towards a character(f) be important for the analysis of the reading process? One might object to this choice of focus by pointing out that people sometimes read fiction because they appreciate the aesthetic pleasure they get out of a finely crafted text, or because they want to be distracted by a thrilling plot, or to

²⁹⁵ Williams 2012.

²⁹⁶ Walton 1990, 273.

delve into a 'period atmosphere'.²⁹⁷ Fiction reading is not just about meeting fictional people, it is more complex than that. If the reading process is to be successful, the language and the imagery of the text have to capture the attention of the reader; the focus of the reader on a character(f) is not necessary for a successful reading experience. There are works of fiction which do not even contain fictional persons that are represented in any depth, as for instance Milorad Pavic's novel *Dictionary of the Khazars*²⁹⁸. Still, it is possible for us to engage with such a work of fiction in a way that we find satisfactory. So why insist on the importance of characters(f)?

Human beings characteristically look out for an 'other' in any area of life of which they become aware. As discussed in section 2.4 in connection with narrative identity accounts, a convincing explanation for this kind of behaviour is the typical development of selfhood in a young child: a human being is able to recognize herself as distinct from others when she has experienced a relationship with an 'other' who is important to her.²⁹⁹ This taught pattern of defining oneself by looking at others motivates a fiction reader to scan the work for an entity with human features whom she can either identify with or distance herself from. The fictional entity does not need to be represented as human being; it may have humanoid features in the guise of an animal, a plant, a machine, or an extra-terrestrial.

In *Dictionary of the Khazars*, for example, there are no prominent characters(f). But even in such a case, the reader will discover the attributes of a particular person. Taking in the style and the perspectives which the author used in the novel, and interpreting it in her own way, the reader speculates about the author's character and personal life. The reader will usually be tempted to do this because the urge to look for an 'other' is strong enough to motivate her. The template on which the reader works to find this 'other' is the implied author. As Ricoeur says in his account of fiction reading, there is typically a dialectic between the imaginings mandated by the work of fiction and the expectations of the reader where the 'implied author takes the initiative in the show of strength underlying the relation between writing and reading'.³⁰⁰

In every work of fiction, the implied author is defined by the choices made and representations created by the real author; the implied author is designed by the real

²⁹⁷ In Samuel Johnson's opinion, 'It is difficult to enumerate the several motives which procure to books the honour of perusal: spite, vanity, and curiosity, hope and fear, love and hatred, every passion which incites to any other action, serves at one time or other to stimulate a reader.' (Johnson 1754).

²⁹⁸ Pavic 1989.

²⁹⁹ Atkins 2008, 46.

³⁰⁰ Ricoeur 1985, 160.

author, regardless of whether the real author intended this or not. As W. C. Booth puts it, ‘though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear’.³⁰¹ The reader, however, creates her own version of this implied author – I shall call the reader’s version the ‘**inferred author**’ from now on – by applying her own knowledge of the world and her preferences to the text. During the reading process, the reader discovers the inferred author to have certain attitudes and preferences, for instance an ironic stance towards gender questions, which the reader might endorse or reject. The reader interprets the inferred author’s point of view and, from the snippets of information given, immediately extrapolates these data into a guess about what kind of person this inferred author might be, and what her own attitudes towards this hypothetical person might be. It is important to note that the inferred author is not part of the fictional story – he is, however, part of the story the reader makes up in parallel to following the fictional story. One might call him a meta-fictional character – a **character(mf)**.³⁰² The reader interacts with him as the story develops, agreeing or disagreeing, being disgusted with him or awed by his powers. In general, the reader tries to identify with the person she takes the inferred author to be. The reason for this is that by reading the book, the fiction reader has already given the inferred author partial control over the direction of her imagination, thus creating a relationship of trust from the reader’s side. I agree here with Gregory Currie who says that if the reader adopts the framework and point of view provided by the author, the reader has an experience of sharing that depends on psychologically important mechanisms of joint attention and imitation.³⁰³

Why distinguish between three levels of participation?

My interest in the reader’s relation with characters(f) makes it useful to classify the reader’s engagement according to her degree of involvement with a character(f). Here, my approach differs slightly from Walton’s: His emphasis is on the difference between appreciation of a work of fiction with participation and appreciation without participation. He holds that participation involves taking part in the game of make-

³⁰¹ Booth 1983, 20.

³⁰² It is possible to imagine other characters(mf) besides the inferred author – for instance the inferred librarian who chose the book for the lending library, or the inferred original purchaser in case of a second-hand book (most fascinating when they leave marks or comments in the book). Investigating this is, however, outside the scope of my work.

³⁰³ Currie 2010, 87/88.

believe which the work of fiction mandates, where the reader becomes a reflexive prop who generates fictional truths about herself and gets caught up in the work of fiction. In appreciation without participation, he says, the reader is usually reminded of the falsity of fictional propositions and thus unable to take part in the game and imagine it from inside.³⁰⁴

I agree with his view of fiction reading as a game of make-believe, but I prefer to take a wider view of participation than Walton does. As an inferred author can always be discovered in a work of fiction (regardless of whether the actual author intended this or not), I hold that participation takes place on two levels: first, the reader negotiates with the inferred author about how and to what extent she is going to accept the given text, and second, the reader enters the fictional world offered in the text. Even what Walton calls ‘appreciation without participation’ has a playful aspect which involves an interaction between the reader and the inferred author. The reader creates a story of her own in which she has an ongoing dialogue with the inferred author, and on this level the inferred author becomes a character(mf) with whom the reader tries to identify during her appreciation of a work of fiction. This is why I think that all of my three levels of reader involvement (appreciative, sympathetic, or empathetic, from a first person point of view) can be termed ‘participation’.

In order to participate in a work of fiction, a reader has to use her imagination. Currie defines two levels of imaginary action in fiction reading: primary imaginings are cases where we imagine what is fictional (for instance that Anna Karenina commits suicide)³⁰⁵ whereas secondary imaginings consist of an ‘empathetic re-enactment of the character’s situation’.³⁰⁶ I do not adopt this distinction because I think that Currie’s term ‘primary imaginings’ covers the same area as the term ‘supposing that’, and I would like to use the word ‘imagine’ in the sense of not only accepting but actually processing a proposition. This includes having some psychological attitude towards the object of the imagination, like believing, disbelieving, doubting, wanting or regretting it. As Walton puts it, ‘Imagining (propositional imagining), like (propositional) believing or desiring, is *doing* something *with* a proposition one has in mind’.³⁰⁷

For the fiction reader, I define three levels of engagement: appreciation, sympathy, and empathy.

³⁰⁴ Walton 1990, 275.

³⁰⁵ Currie 1995, 152.

³⁰⁶ Currie 1995, 153.

³⁰⁷ Walton 1990, 20.

Appreciation

When I appreciate a work of fiction, I accomplish at least four things, all of them from an external point of view: First, I understand the meaning of the text. If I did not do that, for instance if I thought that Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* was a light-hearted comedy, appreciation of this work would not be possible.

As a second point of appreciation, I recognize the artistic features of the text that make it interesting to me. Usually these features are employed to present situations that I know from my own life, or my cultural background, from an unusual angle. To appreciate this, I do not need to be able to analyze how these features work, I just recognize that they make me see things differently. For instance, Jane Austen's famous first sentence from *Pride and Prejudice*³⁰⁸ ('It is a truth universally acknowledged ...') makes me view the limited outlook of English gentry in the countryside in the 19th century in a new light.

The third aspect of appreciating a work of fiction is that I develop an interest in the story or in the character(f). I am motivated to read more of the narrative, to linger on the impressions gained, even to compare the actions of the protagonists with possible choices that I would make in their situation. For me to be able to appreciate a work of fiction, I do not need to feel for a character(f). Still, I can indulge in thought experiments of what I would do in Mrs. Bennett's place, with five unmarried daughters: would I go to Bath to present them to society, would I go abroad with them to catch eligible suitors, would I train them to become governesses?

This does not preclude, however, my having feelings for a character(f) – if I do, I participate in the work of fiction on more than one level simultaneously, on the level of empathy as well as of appreciation. Goldie's concept of 'in-his-shoes imagining' is an attempt to span several levels with one definition. He says that for 'in-his-shoes imagining', one needs to merge two perspectives: the internal, to imagine the other person's goals and fears, and the external, to judge the differences of characterisation between the other and one's own self.³⁰⁹ Thus, his definition can cover the scale of feelings for a character(f) from appreciation to empathy. This is an interesting approach, but I do not adopt it because I shall argue that the level of empathy is most likely to trigger strong emotions in the reader, and therefore, I am going to investigate it

³⁰⁸ Austen 2008,1.

³⁰⁹ Goldie 2000, 199.

separately. In my view, these levels of participation should not be conflated; they can exist independently of each other.

The fourth point in appreciation is the game the reader plays with the inferred author, or vice versa. The inferred author offers the text to the reader, thus encouraging her to mediate between the world of the text and the world of the reader through the reading process. As we saw earlier, Ricoeur says that the inferred author ‘takes the initiative in the show of strength underlying the relation between writing and reading’.³¹⁰ When I read the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, I understand that the inferred author is using irony to achieve several ends simultaneously: to amuse us with a gentle critical view of the fictional community, to make us feel comfortable by offering us the companionship with the inferred author in irony, and to make us inclined not to feel too deeply for the characters(f) about to be represented. My reaction as a reader could run into different directions, depending on what kind of person I am and in what kind of mood I happen to be. For instance, I could be happy to join the inferred author in her satirical depiction of English rural country life in the early 19th century; or I could sneer at the overly obvious attempt of the inferred author to capture my attention to a boring subject; or I could be offended by the coldness with which the inferred author approaches her characters’ pressing problems. All possible reactions (with the exception of an immediate closing of the book after the first sentence) show that reader interacts with the text, taking on the challenges the inferred author created, and building expectations based on both the story and the reader’s own life experiences. When the reading process starts, the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect, even if the reader keeps a distance from the text by remaining aware of its artificiality. The reader may view the text as contrived, but the inferred author has a real presence that cannot be denied.

Sympathy

Sympathy is different from appreciation because it requires that I take a personal interest not only in the text, but also in a character(f)’s plight. It takes three steps to develop sympathy towards a character(f): first, just as in appreciation, I need to

³¹⁰ Ricoeur 1988, 160.

understand the meaning of the text regarding the character's situation in the story (as far as the narrator has unveiled it to me).

As a second step, I have a look at the character(f) from the outside, and if her situation in the fictional world seems familiar to me, I notice this immediately. There is a wealth of templates for human conditions which I, the reader, have internalized during my cultural education. For instance, I can recognize a character(f) in the role of a maltreated child, a war hero, a maiden in distress, or a victim of an unsolvable moral conflict. This recognition predisposes me to feel emotions when I read about the character being in a situation that is any way critical for her. Sympathy is an observer's emotion – I observe and judge the character(f)'s situation from an external point of view.

When I recognize a sympathy-deserving situation, I take the third step towards sympathy: I feel the emotion that I have learned to be appropriate in the situation: compassion, admiration, a general sense of fellow-feeling. This emotional reaction can be directed at a single character(f) or a group of characters(f) – it is not necessary to distinguish individual characters(f) to be able to have it. In order to feel sympathy, I need to fit the character(f)'s situation with a type of situation that is linked to an other-directed emotion in my knowledge and experience of the world.

Summarized like this, it looks as if emotions that are invoked by sympathy consisted of nothing but reacting to clichéd situations. Does this cover all aspects of sympathy?

It certainly does not – sympathy-induced emotions can manifest themselves in different degrees concerning the level of reflection that accompanies them. At the lower end, we have the 'button pushing' phenomenon. If, for instance, a noble underdog is suddenly valued and praised, I feel tears gushing out of my eyes. A fiction example from Dickens is *Our Mutual Friend*³¹¹: when Sloppy first visits Jenny Wren and admires the quality of her hair and her craftsmanship, the reader is immediately struck by his unexpected appreciation of Jenny, and feels a sentimental joy about something wrong that has finally been righted. As this dramatic feature is strongly emphasized in the text, the reader is stuck with the image that forced itself on her, and there is no motivation for her to probe into the character(f)'s feelings from the inside. The button-pushing effect is so strong that it even tends to blind the reader to subtleties of the text.

³¹¹ Dickens 2008b.

As if one had inadvertently looked into a dazzling light, the outlines of the obvious drama seem to linger for a while, obscuring everything else. Depending on the level of reflection the reader likes to adopt, she may either continue to enjoy her feeling of happy fulfilment, or she may be ashamed of her sentimental outburst (and subsequently become sentimental again on a more subtle level when she relishes the funny antics of the characters(f)).

At the upper end of sympathy-induced emotions, we typically find more subtle feelings like compassion or sorrow. In *Our Mutual Friend*, an example of an emotion that requires some reflection is that evoked by the relationship between Riah and Fledgeby. The reader feels pity for Riah because he is oppressed and unjustly accused of being greedy and cruel. This is not an emotion that hits the reader immediately; at first, one is confused as to why Riah bears this treatment so patiently, without protesting against it. But then, one separates the mystery of Riah's character from his piteous situation and feels for him, from the outside, because he has the role of the unjustified sufferer.

Sympathy towards characters(f)³¹² differs from sympathy towards real people on three counts. First, the reader is not moved to immediate action by having sympathy-induced emotions for a character(f) in distress, whereas someone encountering a real person in a similar situation can be moved to action. Reading Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match-Girl*³¹³, I cry when I realize that the girl is going to freeze to death, but I do not lift a finger to save her. The reason for this is, obviously, that I am unable to interact physically with a fictional world. Second, the reader usually tends to be more unforgiving towards a character(f)'s moral mistakes than to the same kind of mistake made by a person in real life. For instance, the narrator in Henry James' novella *The Aspern Papers*³¹⁴ can win our sympathy through his passionate search for the papers of a poet he admired, and through his astute and almost tender perception of his surroundings and the people he meets. When he recoils in horror from the marriage proposal by Tita, who inherited the papers, we are disappointed and disgusted with him, and our sympathy with him is gone. If a friend of ours behaved in a similar way, we would probably think of redeeming factors – that he was out of his depth, overwhelmed, only human. The character(f), however, earns nothing but disgust, all the more so

³¹² A similar case could be made for all represented characters, not just fictional ones. I am not going into details about this debate because it is not part of my project.

³¹³ Andersen 2009.

³¹⁴ James 2013.

because we sympathized with him in the beginning. Third, the reader does not feel responsible for what happens to the character(f). In real life, I would probably feel guilty about living in a society that allows children to die from neglect. But in the story, I am in a fictional world, and thus exempted from civic duties. Even if the author appeals to the fiction reader explicitly to take responsibility for social change, there is nothing I feel compelled to do immediately.³¹⁵ This is true during the reading process – although in further reflection after the reading, I might draw parallels between the real and the fictional world and rethink my responsibilities in the real world.³¹⁶

Empathy

Empathy differs from appreciation and sympathy in an important respect: it involves an internal point of view. When a reader empathizes with a character(f), she simulates the fictional person's feelings by imagining them from inside.

In using the term 'simulate', I would like to be clear that I am not invoking the much-debated question of whether (so-called) 'simulation theory' can or cannot throw light on empathy. Rather, I am using the term in place of Ricoeur's term 'mimesis' as 'simulation' gives a clearer view of the active and creative role the reader has to play when reading with empathy. She does not only imitate, but also needs to make an active contribution by using her own associations to re-create the story with the knowledge and the memories that are available to her.³¹⁷ Obviously, simulation requires the reader to have a deep insight into the character(f)'s mind, mood, and emotions. But this is not sufficient for imagining from inside – for this to be convincing, the reader needs to have detailed ideas about the character(f)'s perceptions, impulses, thoughts, beliefs, judgments, fears and desires in order to slip into their pattern of feeling.³¹⁸

No work of fiction can be meticulous enough to give this level of detail to the reader, and the reader does not expect this to be provided. An important prerequisite for empathy is the motivation for the reader to engage more deeply with the character(f); there has to be an initial spark of interest. As soon as the reader is motivated to simulate a character(f)'s inner life, she starts to fill in the gaps in the picture with

³¹⁵ Actually, such an appeal may have the opposite effect: mentally agreeing with the author's appeal can make the reader feel they have already done something worthwhile, thus being freed of the obligation to do more.

³¹⁶ I shall investigate this more closely in chapter 7.

³¹⁷ As Ricoeur puts it, 'To follow a story is to actualize it by reading it.' (Ricoeur 1984, 76).

³¹⁸ Feagin 1988, 494.

phenomenological content from her own experiential memories, with what it felt like to be in a similar situation. As already discussed in section 2.4.1, this strengthens the impact of the imagining, making the fictional truth feel more ‘life-like’. The links between the reading of the text and the recall of the reader’s embodied experiences create a number of new narrative threads which run alongside the text. The reader’s identification with a character(f) from the inside becomes richer and morally challenging. Depending on the nature of the reader’s empathy with the character(f), these new narrative strands can develop into a ‘self-in-other’ narrative or an ‘other-in-self’ narrative when the reader’s focus has shifted from the text to the recall and re-evaluation of her own experiences. I shall discuss the generation of additional narratives during fiction reading in section 6.2.

Differences between identification, empathy, and adopting goals

In psychological and philosophical literature, identification and empathy with a character(f) are often treated as the same. I hold that there are nuances of identification that do not fit into the concept of empathy, and degrees of empathy that are far removed from identification. These distinctions are important for my definition of the self-in-other- and the other-in-self-narrative, which I shall discuss in detail in the next section.

To clarify such distinctions, I am now going to discuss the arguments of an article by Mar et al. which deals with these issues, albeit on a relatively general level. Their article is about empirical psychological research regarding emotional responses to fiction reading.³¹⁹ Based on their evaluations, Mar et al. classify three kinds of emotional reader reactions: sympathy, empathy, and identification with a character(f). My bone of contention lies in their distinction between empathy and identification

Mar et al. argue that identification is different from empathy in one point: if a reader identifies with a character(f), she wants to be like that character.³²⁰ They say that in identification, the reader takes the goals of the character(f) as her own, and sees herself as that character, in order to be able to re-create the character(f)’s emotions. In contrast to this, they say, empathy requires that ‘we understand a character’s goals through our model of his or her mind, and feel something similar to what the character

³¹⁹ Mar et alii 2011.

³²⁰ Mar et alii 2011, 823/4.

feels, but we do not see ourselves as that character and identify these emotions as our own rather than as the character's'.³²¹

This leads to an interesting question: When I imagine a character(f) 'from the inside', do I maintain a clear differentiation between myself and the character?

The problem needs to be viewed on different levels. On a cognitive level, there is no doubt that during the whole reading process, however engrossing it might be, I remain conscious of the fact that I am a different person from the fictional person whom I am imagining. This is the reason why I am not moved to act on her behalf, and why I am able to imagine things alongside with the imaginings mandated by the narrative.³²² But does my emotional experience during the reading process really belong to me exclusively? Let us look at the scene in the novel *Stoner* where William Stoner, near the end of his life, ponders that maybe he did not love his wife enough.³²³ Reading this, I imagine him seeing Edith for the first time, in a dress of watered blue silk, looking out at the world as if she was always expecting something pleasant to happen, and I simulate his feelings of regret and remorse. At the same time, I recall the situations when I myself felt remorse at not having loved somebody enough, or for the wrong reasons, and I use these memories to flesh out the simulation. Thus, Edith's silk dress may keep company with my mother's hand-knitted sweaters or my grandfather's pipe in the room of my imagination. In the phenomenological conglomerate it is no longer possible to say with certainty which of the feelings invoked belong to my own characteristics, and which to Stoner's. This is why I hold that on the phenomenological level, differentiation between myself and the character(f) during 'imagining from inside' is – at best – fuzzy, but certainly not clear-cut. For me, empathizing with a character(f) means imagining the character(f)'s feelings from inside, and this entails recalling one's own experiential memories which are affectively related to the character(f)'s feelings, and integrating these memory-stories into the narrative.

In a nutshell, I disagree with Mar et al. about their definition of empathy – I hold that emotions evoked by empathy always involve a degree of merging of the reader's and the character(f)'s feelings, in the experience of the reader. I do, however, agree with their view that empathy with a character does not require the reader to identify with a character(f) completely.

³²¹ Mar et alii 2011, 824.

³²² Coplan 2004, 145.

³²³ Williams 2012, 282.

Psychological research supports my judgment of the relationship between the reader's self and characters(f) during empathy. As Miall and Kuiken show, *'conventionally different narrative elements may seem 'the same' by virtue of the progression of feelings that are common to them'*.³²⁴ In their studies of readers' responses, they found that figurative fiction³²⁵ arouses the readers' feelings and prompts them to 'cross boundaries', moving from the fictional situation of the character(f) to other situations of their own life experience which are affectively related to it. When this happens, Miall and Kuiken observed, readers recollect personal memories and the feelings connected to them, thus enriching and extending their perception of the fictional story. While this observation does not prove a merging of the self and the character(f) during empathy, it does at least show that the fiction reader's emotionally charged memories play an important part in the reader's reception in the story, and in the narrative the reader creates during the reading process. Similarly, in Frank Hakemulder's *The Moral Laboratory*, we find reports of empirical evidence that 'character identification involves readers' emotional experiences. ... Another indication of the involvement of readers' self is that not having emotional experiences similar to those of a character hinders the development of empathy'.³²⁶

My second point of criticism of Mar et al.'s definitions regards identification with a character(f). Mar et al. say that identification entails wanting to be like the character(f), and taking on the character(f)'s goals as our own.³²⁷ In my view, identification with a character(f) does not require the combination of these two conditions.

I say that there is a way to adopt a character(f)'s goals without wanting to be like them, for instance by siding with them. I want Mr. Venus in *Our Mutual Friend* to win Peg Riderhood's approval, although Mr. Venus is a strange character whom I would not like to meet in real life, and I would certainly not want to be like him. But I approve of him as a member of society and think that he ought to succeed. I root for him, I endorse his goals, I identify with him – but only up to (or down to) a certain depth, I do not want to go all the way. This is a curious hybrid of feeling: on one hand, I sympathize with Mr. Venus because I find him a likeable person, on the other hand, I cannot help

³²⁴ Miall / Kuiken 2002, 226.

³²⁵ i. e. fiction that contains images and metaphors.

³²⁶ Hakemulder 2000, 72.

³²⁷ Mar et alii 2011, 823.

imagining his inner life from the inside because he is such an intriguing character that I want to find out what it might feel like to be like him.

So here we have a hybrid form of feeling for a character(f): on the one hand, sympathy (I like him from outside), on the other hand, partial identification (I want to experience what he experiences from inside). But at no point do I want to be like him, and I am not sure whether I shall be comfortable sharing his feelings. I feel more like voyeuristic visitor to his inner life.

A different, but also hybrid situation arises when I find myself empathizing with Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*. I relate to Humbert Humbert's problem of having self-destructive goals, but I do not adopt these goals. I feel extreme empathy with him as an excessively troubled human being, and weak identification with him as a whole person.

Summing up, I criticized Mar et al.'s account on two points. First, I argued – contrary to them – that empathy with a character(f) does involve seeing ourselves as that character(f). Second, I pointed out that identification with a character(f) does not entail wanting to be like him, or wanting to adopt his goals. I also showed that there are hybrid forms of empathy and identification, but that one of these types of engagement is always distinguishable as the driving force. I am going to refer to this in the next section when I investigate the reader's role in the fictional world.

Ricoeur's account of participation in the reading process

Ricoeur distinguishes between two levels of participation in fiction reading: aesthetic enjoyment and identification with a character(f) from within. He does not use the term 'level', though; presumably because it would suggest a stability within the reading process which he denies. For Ricoeur, the reader's engagement with the text is an ongoing struggle between the inferred author and the reader, between the strategy of seduction on the inferred author's side and the strategy of suspicion on the reader's side.³²⁸ He describes fiction as an instrument we use in order to understand the connection between action and agent, as 'an immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations.'³²⁹ He does not see these imaginative variations as an impersonal game, but

³²⁸ See section 1.9.

³²⁹ Ricoeur 1992, 159.

as a form of deep reader involvement in the work of fiction: ‘The reader belongs to both the experiential horizon of the work of fiction imaginatively, and to the horizon of his action concretely’.³³⁰

There is, however, one area which Ricoeur does not investigate in detail: the significance of the reader’s emotional engagement during her fiction-related imaginings. I am going address this gap in chapter 8.

Summing up levels of participation

In this section, I explained why I think it is important to investigate the reader’s relations to characters(f). I distinguished between three levels of reader involvement: appreciation, sympathy, and empathy. A reader can be involved on all these levels at the same time: as Amy Coplan puts it, ‘Readers can have a wide range of psychological experiences during engagement with a single narrative. The reader is neither fixed nor immobile; he is neither forced to mirror exactly the characters’ experiences nor forced to observe the characters’ experiences from the outside’.³³¹ Of the three levels of reader participation, I hold empathy to be especially interesting because it is most likely to evoke strong and lasting emotions in the reader.

In the following section, I shall explore the role of the reader who feels empathy with a character(f) in more detail. In particular, I am going to examine the kinds of narrative the reader develops while empathizing with a character(f). I am going to argue that the role of the reader can be best understood by examining the emotions that stimulate the reader into creating layers of narrative which have different connections with the reader’s self.

6.2 The reader in two worlds – real and fictional

In this central part of my account, I am going to explore the process of empathizing with a character(f). The assumption underlying my discussion is that empathy with a character(f) actually occurs – being well aware that not all readers empathize with characters(f), and that even if they do, they do not empathize with characters(f) all the

³³⁰ Ricoeur 2011, 431.

³³¹ Coplan 2004, 148/149.

time. Which elements are involved in the empathizing, and how are they connected with the reader's self? The reader who imagines a character(f) from within appears to be 'inside' another person (albeit a fictional one) – does this mean that she changes her identity? These are the questions I shall tackle in this section. As I shall explain, my account begins from Ricoeur's account of fiction reading, but makes some important distinctions that Ricoeur's account misses. These additional distinctions mainly regard the emotional involvement of the reader. In chapter 8, I shall give a complete overview of how my account of the relations between narrative identity and fiction reading differs from Ricoeur's account.

I begin my inquiry by investigating in which guises the reader and the character(f) appear during fiction reading with empathy. My underlying assumption is that both the reader and the character(f) are beings with human characteristics.

First of all, I shall distinguish between different five kinds of being that can be involved in reader empathy: the idem (the reader's body, character, and habits in the real world), the self (the reader's lived self in the real world), the other (the character(f) in the fictional world as understood by the reader), the self-in-other (the self empathizing with the other), and the other-in-self (the other influencing the way the self views herself). It is important to note that although I call them 'beings' they are not to be understood as distinct entities. Each of these five 'beings' represents a different aspect of the central person involved in the process: the reader herself. So why do I differentiate between them?

I hold that they are important because any of them, or any combination of them, can feature as protagonists in the narratives the reader weaves during fiction reading with empathy. Four kinds of narrative might become active in the fiction reading process: self-narrative, other-narrative, self-in-other-narrative, and other-in-self-narrative. Working out the differences between them, I shall argue that self-narrative is largely suspended during fiction reading. We relinquish our ego and our self-narrative and enter the story of a character(f), the other-narrative. Typically, the other-narrative triggers a self-in-other-narrative when the reader starts to imagine the character(f) from within. However, when the reader feels that imagining the character(f)'s actions pushes her out the realm of her own ethical aims, the self-in-other-narrative eventually turns into an other-in-self-narrative. There is a shifting of protagonists from the character(f) to the reader and vice versa that continues throughout the reading process. As I shall explain, this transferral of roles is managed by the *doppelgänger* function that

accompanies the on-going dialectic between the text (represented by the character(f)) and the reader. Thus, the self-in-other-narrative and the other-in-self-narrative can be viewed as not fundamentally different, but as different outcomes of the doppelgänger function.

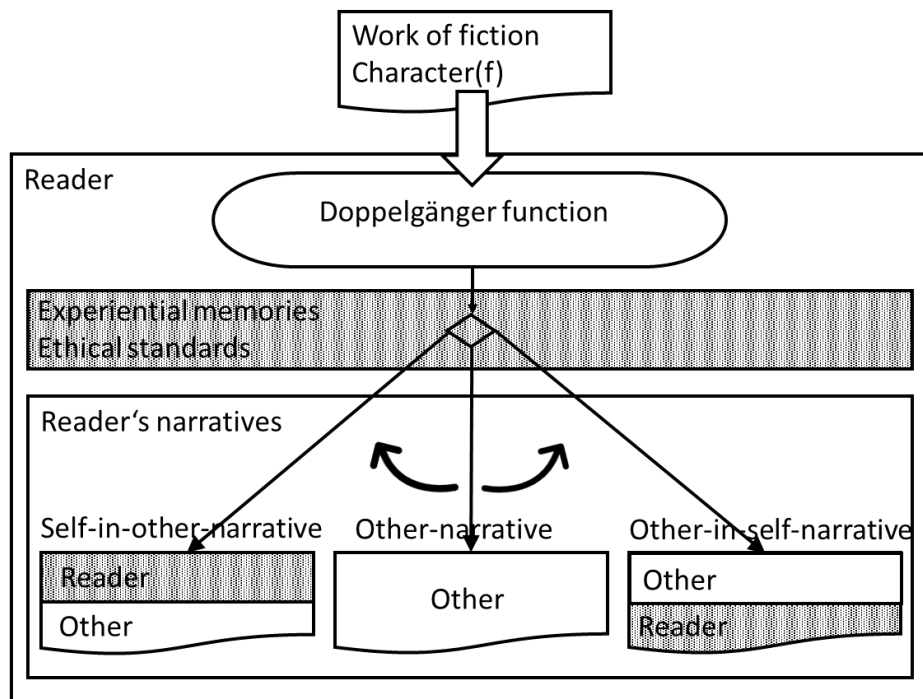


Figure 2: The doppelgänger function

The doppelgänger function makes the reader check the other-narrative for similarities between a character(f) and herself. If the reader finds similarities which are compelling enough, she can switch to a self-in-other-narrative or to an other-in-self-narrative. I am going to explore this in more detail later on in this section.

Summing up, I shall argue that the engagement of the reader with a character(f) can be formulated as a function of the embodied self and the other-narrative. This function is a psychological mechanism that combines the reader's imagination with the recall of experiential memories and with the control mechanism of her ethical standards. As the function produces a self-in-other-narrative at one end and an other-in-self-narrative at the other end, I call it a doppelgänger-function. I shall give detailed examples of how these narratives can develop and switch in section 6.3.

Different beings

Before going into the details of the doppelgänger function, I would like to introduce the beings that can be involved in the reader's engagement with a work of fiction.

The *idem*³³² of the reader contributes to the reading process in a variety of ways. It includes the capacity to manage the physical part (for instance holding the book and reading the words), the reader's character, habits and preferences (determining her approval or disapproval of the work of fiction and the characters(f)), and the intellectual part (understanding the kind of narrative it is, and how the story, the fictional world and the characters(f) are described). In addition to the semantic understanding of the story, the *idem* also provides the faculty of imagination. The imagination combines the fictional text with the reader's internalized cultural images, her character traits and her habits, building new stories involving these elements and providing a setting that triggers the reader's memories. The understanding of the narrative, the acceptance of the work of fiction as worthy of reading, and the identification of the cultural environment in which the work of fiction is embedded enable the reader to use her imagination and fill the gaps in the narrative with enough of her own material to create a fictional world where she can feel 'at home'. Ricoeur speaks of a 'fusion of horizons':³³³ the reader merges the world of the text and her own world when she engages with a work of fiction.

The reader's *self* (or *ipse*³³⁴) is the lived identity of the reader in the real world. During the reading process, the self is mainly restricted to two phenomenological activities: the experience of imagining the fictional world and the characters(f), and the experience of the emotions that are prompted by the reading.

In defining a character(f) as the *other* we have two choices: the other is the character(f) described in the text as imagined by either the ideal reader³³⁵ or the actual reader. In my investigations of empathy with a character(f), the only prerequisite I set is that the reader imagines a character(f) from the inside. She might do that for the wrong reasons, or she might misunderstand the character completely. I hold that this does not

³³² See description of Ricoeur's definition in section 1.2.

³³³ Ricoeur 1991a, 96.

³³⁴ See description of Ricoeur's definition in section 1.2.

³³⁵ This approach is favoured by literary critics.

make any difference for the reading experience.³³⁶ Therefore, I define the other as the character(f) seen by the actual reader.

Similar to the reader's self, the *self-in-other* is an experienced identity. The reader imagines the character(f) from the inside, following the directions in the fictional story. When I imagine Elizabeth Bennett at the ball in *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, I feel for her from inside, experiencing amusement and anger at being snubbed by Darcy, while recalling similar events from my own life, for instance during dancing lessons at school when the best-looking boy asked somebody else to dance with him. I do not, however, imagine the volume of the dance music at Elizabeth's ball, or whether it pleases me, or what the players are like, although Elizabeth would have been well aware of her surroundings. But these experiences are not important for her current conflict, so I can leave them as a blur in my own imagination. My experience is not as rich as hers would have been if the fictional world had been real; it is, however, richer than hers in other aspects because it contains experiential memories from my own life.

The *other-in-self* comes into being when my imagining being inside the character(f) leads me to wanting to be either very much like her, or very different from her. If the conflict of the character(f) takes a strong grip on my own desires or fears, this character(f) seems to enter my own self as either a promising vision or a dreadful menace.

Self-narrative

Having listed the *dramatis personae*, I get to the point where I investigate which narratives the reader can develop during fiction reading with empathy, and how they are related to each other. The first candidate is the self-narrative. As described in section 2.4.3, I follow Ricoeur's definition of self-narrative. According to Ricoeur, a person weaves her past experiences and expectations for the future into a unified narrative that shapes her self-understanding, thus providing her with a practical identity which enables her to act in her social environment.³³⁷

To what extent is my self-narrative active when I empathize with a character(f)? The experiences I go through mainly happen in my imagination; I borrow them from the

³³⁶ In chapter 7 'Beyond the reading process', however, I shall point out that this may make a difference in shaping the reader's self-narrative beyond the reading experience.

³³⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 140.

character(f). In order to feel for the character(f) from inside, I recall experiential memories that are of a similar kind as the experience the character(f) is going through. I can do that without reflecting on what kind of person I am – my memory-fishing is usually triggered by trying to simulate experiencing a current conflict, or the resolution of a conflict, which the character(f) is going through. I do not need to resort to my self-narrative in order to do that. Typically, my memories are activated by the description of a phenomenological sensation of the character(f) presented in the text. As memories are characteristically embedded in **event schemata**³³⁸, they drag up mini-stories that run in parallel to my reading process. These mini-stories are event-related and do not need a connection to my self-narrative in order to be used during my empathizing.

There are, however, occurrences during the reading process which can affect my self-narrative: if I am overcome by emotions, I try to put them on a rational basis by explaining, contradicting or confirming them. But this typically happens after the reading process; during the reading, I am usually too much caught up by the story to examine my reading-induced emotions. Imagining Elizabeth from the inside might cause me to feel a hot flush of anger at arrogant men in general, but I shall disregard it and continue to read the story. Thus, my self-narrative characteristically remains untouched while I am reading.

Other-narrative

The other-narrative is the story of the character(f) as set up in the work of fiction and understood by the reader. My assumption is that every work of fiction contains an entity which can be interpreted as a character(f) (it could be a fictional person, a fictional animal, a fictional machine, or even a fictional landscape), and that a narrative involving the character(f) as an agent (or a sufferer) is constructed in the work of fiction, some of it explicitly, and a large part of it implicitly.

As discussed in section 6.1, the engagement with a work of fiction may also induce the reader to imagine a character(mf), usually the inferred author. As the character(mf) is not part of the fictional narrative itself, the reader does not have an actual story to feed her imagination on, only a bundle of inferred attitudes, preferences, or passions. For this reason, I hold that although the reader can also build an other-

³³⁸ An event schema can be defined as the conceptualization of past experience; in memory, the events are structured into a recognizable script.

narrative for a character(mf), this narrative will probably be too flimsy to trigger identification from within, and thus cannot be subject to the doppelgänger function. Hence, my following discussion only concerns the other-narrative for a character(f).

As many philosophers have successfully argued,³³⁹ the story contained in a work of fiction needs the reception by a reader to be fully configured. Ricoeur says ‘To follow a story is to actualize it by reading it’.³⁴⁰ Each reader creates her own version of the plot and of the characters(f) involved, adding her own knowledge and experience of the world while missing meanings and associations in the text which are foreign to her. The reading process involves a struggle between the reader and the text, resulting in what Ricoeur describes as the ‘three dialectics of reading’:³⁴¹ First, the reader defends her own expectations against the deceptive strategies used in the text; second, the reader tries to configure the implied but unwritten parts of the text; third, the reader sets the cultural paradigms she is familiar with against those which are either confirmed or challenged by the text. As a result of these activities, the reader continues to build her own narrative of the character(f) which is bound to change as the reading progresses.

Does the reader need to feel sympathy for a character(f) to be able to create this character(f)’s other-narrative? It seems plausible that I need to have a minimal feeling of human companionship with a character(f) to be motivated to follow her story. Sympathy would include an interest that the character(f) should flourish, but I hold that one can be motivated to engage with a fictional story without wanting the characters(f) to get what they want. Even if a character(f) is objectionable, I might enjoy following her story. An example for this is Patricia Highsmith’s Tom Ripley. He murders in cold blood to achieve his goals, and I as a reader do not wish him to lead a happy life as a consequence. But his tortured personality is so gripping that I am motivated to construct his other-narrative until the end of the story.

However, it must be noted that there are two variants of the other-narrative: the other-narrative with only appreciation and the other-narrative with additional sympathy.³⁴²

³³⁹ See for instance Wolfgang Iser ‘The Act of Reading’ 1972, Roland Barthes ‘The Pleasure of the Text’ 1973, Ronald Ingarden ‘Phenomenological Aesthetics: An Attempt at Defining Its Range’ 1975.

³⁴⁰ Ricoeur 1984, 77.

³⁴¹ Ricoeur 1985, 168.

³⁴² I am not following up this distinction because this would go beyond the scope of my work.

When a reader empathizes with a character(f), she enters the fictional story and the fictional world – up to a point. Ricoeur says ‘reading itself already is a way of living in the fictitious universe of the work; in this sense we can already say that stories are told but also lived *in the imaginary mode*’.³⁴³ What exactly does this ‘way of living’ in the imaginary mode entail; can we define it? Some of the limitations the reader encounters while imagining the character(f) from within are straightforward. First of all, the reader cannot act in the fictional world (although in cliff-hanger scenes, for instance, the reader might imitate the action of the character(f) by grabbing the table or clenching her fist). Second, and following from this, the reader cannot suffer any real-life consequences from what happens in the fictional world. The climber in the story may fall to his death; although I suffered inside him until he died, I continue to live. In spite of this divergence, some things happen in parallel during the reading process: the fictional climber is released from his life, and I am also released from the fictional climber’s life. The other-narrative of the fictional climber comes to an end simultaneously with my self-in-other-narrative. If the story continues after this, I see the deceased climber from the outside.

This is an indication that there can be many switches between the other-narrative and the self-in-other-narrative. To understand how this develops, and in which respect these two narratives mirror each other, we need to get back to the question of how empathy is generated. The first step towards empathy is typically that the reader takes an interest in the character(f) because the character(f)’s fears and desires are similar to her own. She can proceed to imagine the character(f) from inside if she is able to identify the shape of the character(f)’s conflict³⁴⁴ as something she knows from her own life. As Feagin points out, empathy only arises if the structure of my emotions evoked by the kind of conflict the character(f) goes through is similar to the structure of emotions the character(f) feels.³⁴⁵ It is not important here that the character(f) is often different from me in many ways: I can feel empathy with Pincher Martin although he is a handsome young naval lieutenant in the Atlantic Sea during the Second World War,

³⁴³ Ricoeur 2011, 432.

³⁴⁴ A conflict can be defined as a situation where there is a significant difference between what I believe to be the case and what I desire to be the case.

³⁴⁵ Feagin 2012, 161.

whereas I am a middle-aged woman sitting in a library in Zürich in 2018. What draws me into him is our common terror of near-drowning and existential annihilation.

If I manage to feel empathy with a character(f), my imagination has already started to integrate me into the fictional story in a meaningful way: I let the part of my self that is affected by the conflict take part in the narrative to such an extent that I can build a story of my own. This story is about me, because I am the principal character in my own life, but I am transported into different conditions. In this imagined narrative, I perform the actions of the character(f), and I take over the events of the fictional narrative into my own self-as-other-narrative. My motivation to carry on with the self-as-other-narrative is my desire to experience the resolution of the conflict presented by the work of fiction. There are many lacunae in my self-in-other-narrative; they open up in all the places where the character(f)'s story is incompatible with anything I ever experienced. Pincher Martin, for instance, is insanely jealous of his colleague because his colleague won the love of the girl he himself lost. As I have never been in a situation like that, this is not part of my self-in-other-narrative; it is, however, a part of the other-narrative to which I switch back when I read the scenes that deal with excessive jealousy. Lacunae like this do not, however, detract from the poignancy of my self-in-other-narrative; on the contrary, the focus on a single conflict enhances my interest in it. I allow myself to be carried into a world which is different from my own, and in which things are done in a different way. This is what Ricoeur calls the appropriation of the text by the reader.³⁴⁶

The self-in-other-narrative can only be rich and satisfactory as long as my empathy with the character(f) continues, fleshed out by my own experiential memories. If – during the reading process – my empathy turns into sympathy or appreciation, the self-in-other-narrative I have been building is suspended. Are there any necessary or sufficient conditions that must be fulfilled to keep my self-in-other-narrative active?

This question is very similar to the inquiry I encountered in Part I on narrative identity: what are the causes that make me refigure my self-narrative? I started out with Ricoeur's model of narrative identity, holding that a narrative identity is a necessary mediator between the actions of a person as an embodied subject in the world on the one hand, and her ethics on the other hand. A self-narrative gives a person a sense of unity that she needs in order to maintain her self-esteem during her interactions with the

³⁴⁶ Ricoeur 1991a, 95.

physical world and her social nexus. Any significant conflict with the given outside world triggers a revaluation of a person's self-narrative, integrating past events and future expectations, with a special emphasis on her experiential memories. So the necessary condition for refiguration of my self-narrative is a conflict I encounter in my relations to the external world.

In a self-in-other-narrative, the conflict does not arise from the real world, but from a fictional one. I (as the reader) adopt the character(f)'s conflict as my own. In order to simulate the character(f)'s feelings as richly as possible, I fill the gaps of the story with my own experiential memories. Ricoeur says that imagining a character(f) from within is like going through imaginative variations of one's own life, and that one needs the 'anchor' of the body to the earth in order to recall embodied experiences.³⁴⁷ The phenomenological part of my memories supplies my imaginings with depth and richness. Without the help of embodied experiences, my imaginative variations would not be convincing because they would lack an important aspect of real life: the irreducible link between the body and the self.

I agree with Ricoeur here, but I go one step further: I claim that memories of embodied experiences generate stories of their own. When I as a fiction reader start to recall my experiential memories during the configuration of my self-in-other-narrative, the story I am engaged with starts to deviate from the story presented in the text. Recollected memories are usually not restricted to single flashes, but to event schemata; they are embedded in small stories of their own. During the integration of these memories into the self-in-other-narrative, these connected stories find their own place in the story, subtly moving the focus of the story away from the character(f) and in the direction of myself. I still simulate the conflict of the character(f), but at the same time I simulate a past conflict of my own in a different presentation. If I am primarily moved by my recollections at this point, I am not only simulating a character(f)'s emotion. I am then also feeling a real emotion, and I myself (in a simulated environment) am the focus of this emotion. A part of myself is now embedded in the character(f), making the character(f) precious to me in two ways: I care for myself in the character(f)'s guise, and I care for myself in a particularly controlled and intense way. Temporarily living in the fictional world, I am not in danger of having the contingencies of real world events

³⁴⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 150.

spoil my concentration, and I am also free of the inhibitions that limit the enjoyment of my emotions in the social context of the real world.

If I should find that my empathy for the character(f) was misplaced, I can withdraw myself with no damage done. I care for the character(f), being interested in her well-being (through my self-involvement), but I am not committed to care for the character(f) forever. Reading Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, for instance, I feel empathy with Pamela in the beginning because she manages to preserve her sense of self-respect in spite of the pressure she is put under, and I rave with her against the ridiculous vanities and presumptions of Mr. B. When Mr. B. later proposes marriage to her, however, it turns out that Pamela has always loved him. Seeing her now revealed as one of the worst hypocrites in literature, I withdraw my empathy and slip out of her character(f). My relationship with Pamela is over, and there is no harm done, except for a slight disappointment on my side that the story continues in such an unappealing way. As this example illustrates, the possibility of experiencing a deep emotion without having to fear unpleasant consequences is one of the reasons why experiencing a self-in-other-narrative is so attractive to the reader.³⁴⁸

A self-in-other-narrative is one of the directions into which my other-narrative can swing when I recall experiential memories during fiction reading with empathy. The other direction into which it can swing is an other-in-self-narrative.

Other-in-self-narrative

The other-in-self-narrative can come into being at the point where a character(f) starts to act in a way that does not follow the ethical norms which have governed my own actions in the real world, either in a positive or a negative way. If the character(f) reacts differently in a fictional conflict than I did in a similar situation which I just recalled, and the conflict is important to me, I receive unfamiliar information, which I need to process. Two things happen: I start to think differently about the character(f), I wonder why I acted – or would have acted – differently, and I begin to speculate whether I should think differently about myself, or whether I should change the way I lead my life. On the one hand, dealing with the unexpected information changes my expectations

³⁴⁸ Experiencing emotions during fiction reading can, of course, have side effects which are unpleasant to the reader. Children may have nightmares after getting excited by horror stories, or grown-ups may be miserable for days after reading Beckett's *Molloy*. But the reader usually does not expect that before starting out on the reading experience, so this does not influence her motivation to read fiction.

of how the fictional story is going to continue (thus influencing the other-narrative). This aspect is part of what Ricoeur calls the reader's response to the inferred author's strategy of persuasion.³⁴⁹

On the other hand, this fictional conflict also changes the role that my recalled experiential memories have in the ongoing self-in-other-narrative. The usual function of these memories during empathy is to strengthen my simulation of the character(f)'s situation, but when I no longer feel in the driving seat of the story they become subject to increased scrutiny and re-evaluation. I no longer see myself as the only possible role model for my own life. Tentatively, I try out the unfamiliar actions of the character(f), and thus, the other-in-self-narrative develops.

In John Steinbeck's novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*³⁵⁰, for example, I would have expected Ethan Hawley to overcome his resentment and find a way of changing his life in a morally acceptable way. Then, when I learn that he has betrayed his boss to the authorities, leading to the man's deportation, I expect Ethan to encounter a major difficulty. I even anticipate him to perish in some way, because he has betrayed himself and his own values, which seems unforgiveable. On the other hand, I empathize with him, feeling his existential loneliness in the midst of his family and his home town, and I tentatively wonder what would happen if I ever gave in to an impulse to do something bad like Ethan: 'What I had done and planned to do was undertaken with full knowledge that it was foreign to me'.³⁵¹

It is possible that my moral judgment of the character(f)'s action is different from my moral judgment of my own remembered actions in similar situations. If this is the case, I am forced into reflection about the simulated conflict. As this happens unexpectedly during the reading process, I cannot plan this in a structured way. Instead, the character(f) seems to enter my own experiential memories, performing counterfactual actions in my own past life. Depending on my moral judgment, the character(f) can then slip into the role of either a dangerous devil or a wonderful role model. I watch him 'taking over' my life in an imaginary mode. Thus, I can imagine and evaluate possible outcomes of actions which I would normally judge to be either immoral or beyond my power in real life.

³⁴⁹ Ricoeur 1988,168.

³⁵⁰ Steinbeck 2001.

³⁵¹ Steinbeck 2001, 187.

Because it is unexpected, and because it interrupts the reading process, the other-in-self-narrative is usually put on hold deliberately by the reader as soon as she becomes aware of this, to be evaluated in a more organized and differently structured way after the reading process.

The doppelgänger-function

The doppelgänger function makes the reader, as it were, look into a mirror while imagining the other-narrative, swinging either into the direction of the self-in-other-narrative or in the direction of the other-in-self-narrative. As we saw in the description of the self-in-other-narrative and the other-in-self-narrative respectively, there are attributes they have in common: both are induced by the integration of the reader's experiential memories into the simulation of the character(f)'s situation, and both are motivated by a judgmental comparison of the character(f)'s behaviour in the fictional story and one's own behaviour in a similar situation as represented by the recalled memory. In the self-in-other-narrative, an imaginative variation of my self hijacks the fictional story, whereas in the other-in-self-narrative, an imaginative variation of the character(f) hijacks my recalled sense of self.

The search for similarities between the character(f) and the reader appears to be a fundamental feature of fiction reading with empathy. This does not seem surprising because – as already discussed in section 2.4.1 – it is an integral part of personal development, starting in early childhood, that a person learns to see herself as distinct from others, and to compare herself to others. Because a person's position in her social nexus is important for her self-esteem, a part of her is trained to keep on scanning her environment for other persons to relate herself to, although she may not be conscious of this.³⁵²

Social psychologists have been investigating the question of how and why people perform social comparisons. Recent research has shown that people often compare themselves to others spontaneously and unreflectively, and that this occurs on a regular basis because it is an efficient way of gaining self-knowledge.³⁵³

³⁵² See for instance Corcoran et al. 2011, 119-120 and Garcia et al. 2013, p. 634 for a literature overview on psychological research on the topic of self-evaluation by social comparison.

³⁵³ Corcoran / Mussweiler 2010, 79 and Taylor 1981, 195.

During the reading process, the reader's spontaneous social comparison – in my terms, the doppelgänger function – is directed towards the character(f), in particular towards the ones the reader imagines from inside. I call this procedure the doppelgänger function of narrative generation because it becomes stronger and more effective whenever it discovers a large overlap between the character(f)'s attributes and the reader's own. My hypothesis, supported by an inference to the best explanation, is that the doppelgänger function is a general human capability. It works as a monitor, constantly switched on, alerted to find relations between the reader and the character(f). On a meta-level, it steers my attention, influencing the direction of my imagination.

The minimal likeness I need to discover to empathize with a character(f) is a similarity in a disposition or character trait that is important to me; at the maximum stage, I would find out that the narrative is really about myself. As soon as I have acknowledged that a character(f) is my 'doppelgänger' in an important respect, I watch her actions critically: does she come up to my expectations? This question becomes almost as important to me as if it was a question about myself. I draw on my experiential memories to simulate the character(f) in a more life-like way. As the situation I remember will never be exactly the same as the situation in the fictional story, I have to take new parameters into consideration when I build my self-in-other-narrative and integrate the elements of my memory-story. The first story I typically switch to from the other-narrative is always the self-in-other-narrative: How would I have acted, endowed with both the characteristics of the character(f) and my own knowledge of life?

As soon as the character(f), although so much like me in many respects, behaves in a way that that I judge to be morally superior or inferior to what I think my own behaviour would have been, my focus shifts. Suppose I could have been as good / as bad as my doppelgänger – how would this have influenced my life? At this point, my narrative changes from a self-in-other-narrative to an other-in-self-narrative, and I let myself be led through the story by the character(f).

These narratives can be suspended at any time, to be taken up and changed whenever my engagement with the character(f) changes. The doppelgänger-function leads the focus of my imagination towards one of these narratives at a time.

The following diagram summarizes the relation between the reader's self and the fictional other during empathic fiction reading:

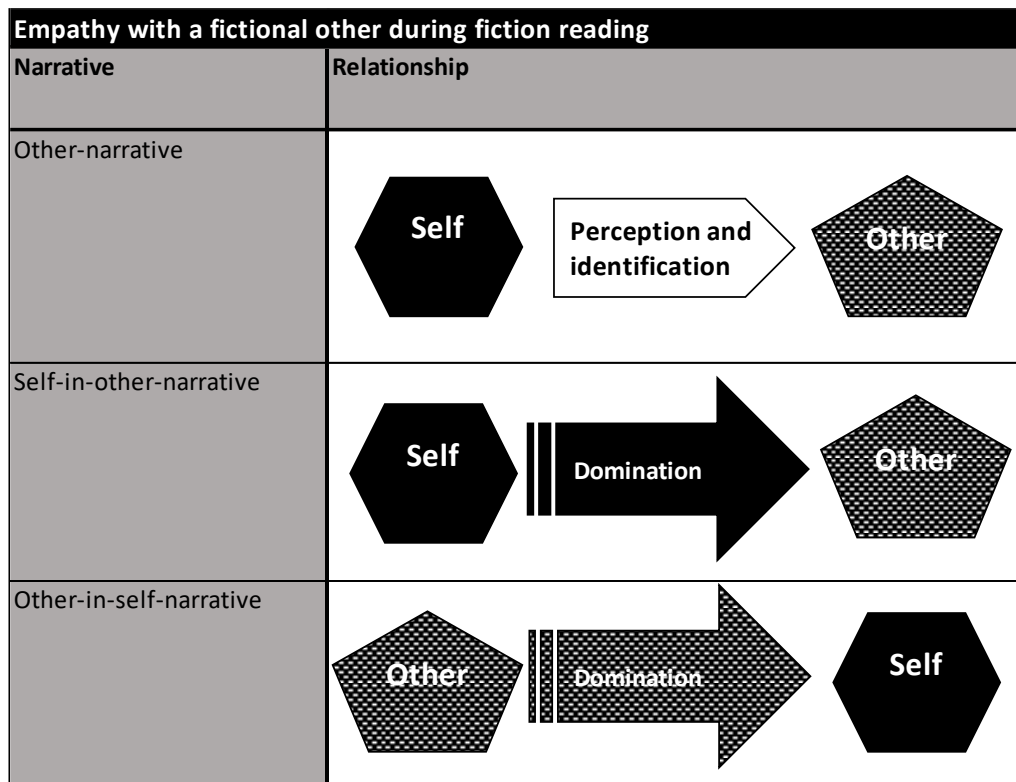


Figure 3: Empathy with a fictional other

In the next section, I shall use examples from the novel *Stoner* to show how the doppelgänger function can generate a change in the type of narrative during fiction reading.

6.3 Example of the doppelgänger-function: reading John Williams' *Stoner*

In this section, I am going to give an example of how the doppelgänger function prompts me as a reader to generate fictional narratives on different levels, with different protagonists. The work of fiction I choose to illustrate a possible reading experience is John William's novel *Stoner*. I selected this novel because it is widely acknowledged to create a particularly vivid reading experience, evoking readers' emotions, so the general processes I describe here are not likely to be idiosyncratic but shared by many.

The novel's protagonist, William Stoner, is presented to the reader slowly. We have to build the other-narrative (in this case: the Stoner-narrative) step by step. This is in keeping with Stoner's character and development: He is introduced to the reader as an introverted man who takes a long time to confront his own fears and desires, and who is also slow in recognizing the driving emotions of the people close to him. This

makes it easy for a reader to imagine him from inside: we all have moments of timidity and denial, and Stoner lives and suffers them openly for us.

A particularly moving part of the book is the scene where Stoner furnishes his office, his sanctuary from a difficult world.

The description of Stoner sanding a wooden board in his study is an image of what the book does to the reader: the old caked paint is rubbed off painfully with a rough surface so that the structure below begins to shine. In the same way, the reader begins to appreciate a character(f) who was initially presented as a nondescript, rather awkward man who dies unlamented and unremembered. The sanding of the board is a beautiful image which has many associated meanings, and it leads the reader to appreciate the work of fiction aesthetically.

Simultaneously, this scene enables the reader to identify with Stoner from the inside in more depth. We already feel for him because in his relations with other people in the novel, he is generally treated unfairly. The others misjudge him, or are just not interested in him. We have all been in situations like that, and can thus contribute experiential memories to make Stoner's conflicts more vivid in our imagination. When we read the description of how the wood begins to show its structure under Stoner's workmanship, starting to glow, we are motivated to recall memories of occasions where we made a rough thing shine through the labour of our own hands – this might be the stripping of floorboards, the cleaning of an old painting, anything that involved a similar process of successfully making a physical object more attractive through our own manual labour. These memories bring their own mini-stories into the narrative as we read: for example of how our arms hurt after the room was finished, and none of our friends understood our elation at the job well done; or of how the wood-dust tickled our nose, or how an artistic mural was revealed when we took the paper off the wall. All of these stories run on together with the Stoner-narrative we are building, producing a new self-in-Stoner-narrative. The glow of the remembered experience, enhanced by the Stoner story, is rekindled in our breast. Through our near-doppelgänger Stoner, we are able to relive our pleasant or unpleasant memories, enhanced by new attributes from the fictional scene. Although caught up in the novel, we are happy about pleasing sensual experiences that happened to ourselves, or unhappy about conspiracies that were directed against ourselves. We are caught up in a self-in-Stoner-narrative.

As the sanding-scene continues, we become awed by Stoner's quiet persistence in his work and in his way of consistently 'making' himself into the man he feels he can

be, and should be. There is something inspiring about following Stoner's actions: we get the impression that Stoner is a man who will always be true to himself, as best he can. Influenced by his example, we begin to feel guilty about the petty worries we often feel, or felt at the time of our recalled memories. We felt slighted when our friends did not praise the cleaned painting – and we suspect that Stoner would not have minded, being content with the result of his work. As we introduce an imaginary Stoner into our memory of restoring the painting, we generate a Stoner-in-self-narrative. We are glad to have Stoner as our near-doppelgänger, showing us the way we should go. The Stoner-in-self-narrative will not last long, however, as it keeps us from reading on, but for the time being, it generates another emotion in us: the joy of having discovered a fellow-feeling with someone else, feeling 'worthy of being human' based on our success of becoming aware of the importance and difficulty of the human situation.

As the example illustrates, the doppelgänger-function manipulates the way our reading experience develops, and it leads us to create both self-in-other-narratives and other-in-self-narratives as variations of the other-narrative that we need to build in order to understand the story. In the other-in-self-narrative, we simulate the emotions of the fictional 'other', but in addition, we have genuine emotions which are about situations in which we found ourselves in the past, through our recalled experiential memories. These are often self-conscious emotions like shame or pride. The other-in-self-narrative can lead to a slightly different kind of genuine emotion: to a fleeting elation about a lesson learned or a connection understood, or to a feeling of guilt about an unacknowledged desire to do something that seems wrong to us. I shall explore these emotions in more detail in section 7.1.

This sums up the investigation of a kind of experience the reader can have while the reading still continues. As we saw, the reading experience includes simulated emotions (from 'inside' a character(f), as part of empathizing with this character) as well as genuinely felt emotions (from inside the reader's self).

In the next chapter, I shall investigate how the reading process affects the reader beyond the actual reading process.

7 Beyond the reading process

In this chapter, I deal with the question of why and how fiction reading can invoke subsequent self-reflection. This is an important part of my inquiry because it addresses one of the gaps in Ricoeur's account. I am going to outline my own views on self-reflection in this chapter, leaving the dispute with Ricoeur's views to chapter 8.

The discussion of the influence of fiction on the reader's mind and morals dates back to Plato, who famously stipulated in Book II of *The Republic* that only ethically uplifting stories should be told to the guardians, so that they cannot be confused in their moral judgments.³⁵⁴ In more recent discussions, there are two bones of contention, one of them quite similar to Plato's worry. I am looking at two issues here. First: does fiction reading typically lead to conscious and voluntary self-reflection? Second: is reading-induced self-reflection always good for us?

The first (Platonic) question is this: does fiction cause the reader to reflect consciously on the fictional content, and her own emotional reaction to it, or is there an insidious unconscious influence against which the reader is powerless? Typically, a mixture of both will occur, but which of these influences persists after the reading process? My aim is to find out more about the long-term effects of reading fiction when a reader imagines a character(f) from within, especially its potential of changing the reader's self.

There are a number of articles on empirical psychological research which suggest that readers who enjoy being 'transported' into a fictional story tend to be influenced by the preferences of protagonists whom they like, without being aware of this.³⁵⁵ These experiments are typically based on the readers' self-assessment immediately after the reading process. As already discussed in section 6.1, their results have strengthened my resolve to investigate the relation between fiction reading and the reader's self during the reading process. However, it remains an open question whether the short-term results gained in this way can be extrapolated into the long term, and the studies themselves state that there is no reliable basis for such an extrapolation. This does represent a challenge to my account; however, it is far from decisive because

³⁵⁴ For instance on Homer's tales about the gods: 'These are the kind of sentiments about the gods which will arouse our anger; and he who utters them will be refused a chorus; neither will we allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young, meaning, as we do, that our guardians, as far as men can be, should be true worshippers of the gods and like them.' Plato, *Republic*, II, 383c.

³⁵⁵ Green / Dill 2013, 1.

currently, there are no representative empirical studies that examine the longer-term effects that my account is concerned with. So for that reason, I am going to set the question aside for the purposes of this discussion. What I am doing here is building a plausible model that requires empirical testing.

As a second topic, I shall discuss the positive or negative effects of fiction reading that can result from conscious reflection on the reading process. Do stories help me to reflect on my life, and thus find an inner equilibrium that supports me in leading a unified life? Normative accounts of narrative identity (NINAs) say that it does, provided that the reality constraint and the articulation constraint are met.³⁵⁶ If this were the case, all fiction readers (except the seriously deluded ones) would be happy people who are content with the life they lead. When I look at the discontented lives of some of my fiction-reading acquaintances, it is obvious to me that fiction reading does not always have this effect. It can even have dangerous consequences. As I discussed earlier, Peter Goldie identifies fictionalizing tendencies that can jeopardize a person's self-narrative, and this kind of fictionalizing can also be triggered when a reader engages with a fictional story.³⁵⁷ I am going to investigate on which of the three narrative levels I defined (other-narrative, self-in-other-narrative, other-in-self-narrative) fictionalizing tendencies can occur.

Other philosophers tend to place more importance on the positive aspects of a reader's self reflection. Paul Ricoeur holds that 'we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively',³⁵⁸ and, in the same vein, Martha Nussbaum says: 'novels can be a school for moral sentiments'.³⁵⁹ I am going to refer to these thoughts in my discussion of the possible influence of fiction reading on self-reflection. Both Ricoeur and Nussbaum agree that fiction reading can be used as a 'thought laboratory' that allows us try out ways of acting / reacting to certain events in theory without having to take the risk of adverse reactions within the real world, thus inducing us to learn more about ethical behaviour. Jenefer Robinson argues that the emotions we experience during fiction reading lead us to make affective appraisals of situations and characters from a fresh point of view, reflect on these assessments, and thus undergo a 'sentimental education' which makes us more discerning in our perception of other people.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ See discussion in section 2.4.2.

³⁵⁷ See Goldie 2012, 161-172, and the discussion in section 2.4.

³⁵⁸ Ricoeur 1992, 162.

³⁵⁹ Nussbaum 1990, 240.

³⁶⁰ Robinson 2006, 157.

Starting with these ideas, I am going to investigate the influences of fiction reading on the reader that go beyond the actual reading process. I shall argue that emotional experiences invoked by fiction reading are just the starting point of a chain of emotional episodes which can culminate in stretches of self-reflection and subsequent gradual adjustments of the reader's self-narrative. In contrast to Nussbaum and Ricoeur, I am going to claim that the success of self-reflection depends on the absence of bias in the self-narrative on which it is built. I define a self-narrative as 'biased' if the role the self plays in her self-narrative diverges from the role the self plays, or is capable of playing, in her real-life social environment. As discussed in section 2.4, I hold that a person can maintain their self-narrative even if it is based on factual errors, except in the most extreme cases. In a biased self-narrative, the reader bases her self-reflection on a weak or a purely imaginary aspect of her personality, thus giving it more than its due importance. I am going to argue that there is at least one drawback to a biased self-narrative: self-reflection may not lead to an improved unity of self.

My focus will be on three areas: the characterization of reading-invoked emotions as real-life experiences, the nature of self-reflections based on these emotions, and the effect of these reflections on the reader's self-narrative.

As we saw in the previous chapter, fiction reading can induce emotions in the reader at various stages of her engagement with the text. In some cases, these emotions give rise to spontaneous self-reflection which does not stop when the reader puts down the book.

Building on the discussion in section 6.1 on levels of participation, I hold that it is important to distinguish between sympathy and empathy when investigating a fiction reader's emotional responses. When we sympathize with a character(f), we feel compassion from an external point of view. Sympathy typically calls forth real-life emotions directed at the type of person, group, or role that the character(f) stands for. In contrast to this, empathy triggers simulated emotions from 'inside' the character(f) as well as real-life emotions directed towards the reader herself. As discussed in section 6.1, the recall of experiential memories can invoke self-directed emotions in the reader. During the reading process, sympathy and empathy can fluctuate and interlace, but typically they belong to different types of reader-generated narrative – sympathy occurs

more frequently during the observance of the other-narrative, whereas empathy is characteristic for the self-in-other- and the other-in-self-narrative.³⁶¹

I claim that real-life emotions which are invoked during fiction reading can continue, and continue in parallel, beyond the actual reading process if they are strong enough, and if they are of the right kind. My second claim is that if real-life emotions were generated during fiction reading at all, these emotions typically start (or continue) a process of reflection and self-refiguration. Depending on the quality of the reader's self-narrative, this self-refiguration can either help or hinder the reader in her quest to maintain a unified self.

This chapter outlines the claims of my own account of the relations between narrative identity and fiction reading.

7.1 Emotions from fiction reading

In this section, I examine if and how emotions that were triggered by fiction reading can persevere and call forth additional emotions when the reader puts down the book and carries on with her 'real' life in the real world. Again, I would like to stress that I am not making a general claim about all readers and all texts – in some readers, fiction reading may never induce emotions.

As shown in the section 6.2, emotions can be invoked at different levels of participation during the reading process. Some types of emotion are more likely to persist after the actual reading process has been finished than others, and I am going to investigate how far they can have an influence on the reader's self-reflection.

I shall distinguish between different types of emotion that can be triggered by fiction reading, putting a special focus on self-conscious emotions and the way they can develop from the other-narrative, the self-in-other-narrative and the other-in-self-narrative. I hold that all of these emotions are real-life emotions; they are not imagined, but they affect the reader directly.

In the context of fiction-reading, I understand self-conscious real-life emotions to be emotions whose focus is the reader's lived self. Self-conscious emotions come into being because we are aware of other people's reactions to us. Our self-conscious emotions are based on our own judgment of our self, evaluating our situation, our

³⁶¹ See definitions in section 6.2.

actions and our feelings as either failing to reach a given goal, or exceeding it.³⁶² The goals that serve as guidelines for such a judgment can be derived from, and motivated by, either the practiced rules of our social nexus, or our own internalised value system.³⁶³ Self-conscious emotions like guilt, shame, embarrassment or pride are related to our self-esteem. As Kristjánsson has argued, self-esteem is not necessarily global, but it can also be ‘domain-specific’,³⁶⁴ concerning only certain aspects of the self. When the aspects of our self on which we want to build our self-esteem suddenly appear to diverge from the aspects we defined in our self-narrative, the practical identity we rely on in daily life can get out of balance.

Under which circumstances are such self-conscious real-life emotions induced by fiction reading, and how do they influence my motivation for self-reflection?

Experience of ‘self-conscious’ emotions

Empirical psychological research has shown that self-conscious emotions like shame, guilt, embarrassment or pride have a particularly high influence on people’s motivation to change their lives, or their life story, much higher than non-self-conscious emotions like fear, disgust, joy or sadness.³⁶⁵ Self-conscious emotions can be distinguished from non-self-conscious emotions as being secondary in the sense that they involve an appraisal of how a situation affects the self.

The influence of self-conscious emotions on a tendency for subsequent self-reflection is widely corroborated by empirical research. As Tracy and Robins point out, self-conscious emotions ‘require self-awareness and self-representation’³⁶⁶. Self-reflection has already started when these emotions occur, and it does not stop with their emergence. Empirical evidence has shown that people tend to experience self-conscious emotions when they become aware that they have not lived up to their own standards in some way.³⁶⁷ During these empirical tests, the participants are confronted with real or fictional cases in which people have reason to feel self-conscious emotions, and they are required to imagine themselves in these situations.

³⁶² Lewis 2011, 2.

³⁶³ Kristjánsson 2010, 127.

³⁶⁴ Kristjánsson 2010, 112.

³⁶⁵ Lickel et al. 2014.

³⁶⁶ Tracy / Robins 2004, 105.

³⁶⁷ For a literature overview of typical empirical tests, see in particular Tracy / Robins (ed.), *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, New York / London, 2007.

Can the detailed findings of these studies, as far as they go, be extended to self-conscious emotions which are evoked during ‘private’ fiction reading? I hold that in general, they can, and I am going to refer to empirical studies during my discussion in this chapter. There is, however, one significant difference between reading for an empirical test and reading on one’s own. This concerns the difference between self-oriented and other-oriented emotions.³⁶⁸ Shame is usually regarded as an other-oriented emotion, because it concerns our moral standing within our society. If fiction reading induces us to feel shame, we are often in a situation where we empathize with a character(f) who is in a type of shameful situation which we know from our own lives. This should, I think, enable us to treat even such an unpleasant emotion as self-oriented, because in company of the character(f) we are able to think about it without feeling threatened. There are no real-life others whose disdain we need to fear if we imagine ourselves to be in the shameful situation of a character(f). If we write about this in a test report, however, the real world looks over our shoulder. Hence, I hold that the impact of self-conscious emotions on the reader’s self may be different in ‘normal’ reading, compared to test study reading.³⁶⁹

In my investigation, I want to explore under which conditions fiction reading can invoke self-conscious emotions, and subsequently cause a process of self-reflection which may lead to self-revaluation.

In general, self-conscious emotions can arise when the subject either fails to conform to social or personal moral standards, or manages to rise above them. Moral emotions in general can be directed against one’s own behaviour as well as against the behaviour of others, so self-conscious emotions form a special class of moral emotions.

Self-conscious emotions typically create a feeling of imbalance in the emoter, which in its turn motivates her to ‘set things right’ in order to regain her feeling of personal unity and self-esteem, and to fit the new situation into her life-story. With negative emotions like guilt or shame, the ‘setting right’ may involve getting rid of bad habits or attitudes, whereas with positive emotions like pride, it may involve getting rid of self-imposed restrictions like shyness. This ‘setting things right’ usually involves refiguring her self-narrative, either for past events or future plans. The directions the

³⁶⁸ Fessler 2007, 187.

³⁶⁹ I assume here that the reader does not use electronic books which collect statistical figures about her reading, or if she does, that she is not aware of that.

refiguring will take depend on the bias (or genre) that accompanies her self-refiguration. I shall discuss the problem of bias and genre later in section ‘Self-examination’.

In the current section, I shall start by examining how, and why, the fiction reading experience can have a different influence on a person’s self-conscious emotions than experiences in real life.

Are self-conscious emotions from fiction reading different from self-conscious emotions evoked in other situations?

Are the self-conscious emotions triggered within the self-in-other-narrative of a particular kind, and do they differ from the self-conscious emotions experienced as a result of real life events? Fiction reading with participation typically has several features which a real life situation does not offer, or at least does not offer to the extent that fiction reading does. These features are: detachment from current concerns that require decisions or action, combined with concentration on a single source of information; unrestrained and risk-free use of imagination, free from social judgment and real-life passions; and motivation to imagine a character from inside. I am going to have a look at these particular attributes of fiction reading (detachment, risk-free imagination, motivation to empathize) separately.

Detachment

The first difference that comes to mind is that in real life, self-conscious emotions are often evoked in situations which require swift action and leave little room for self-reflection. If we are caught in an embarrassing situation, we have to defend ourselves as soon as possible; if we receive a prize, we have to step up and deliver a speech. Even if the real-life situation does not necessitate an immediate response, there is usually a sequence of parallel events going on which needs our constant attention, so the opportunity for paying attention to the self-conscious emotion is limited. By the time we come to reflect on it, other emotions might already overlap it. In fiction reading, however, we shut ourselves off from the outside world, motivated to concentrate on a story without stopping in between to attend to other things. As fiction readers with participation, we are ‘lost’ in the fictional story. Self-conscious emotions have room to

grow on us, gaining weight that carries them beyond the reading process into a process of self-reflection that continues afterwards.

It is therefore plausible that self-conscious emotions that are aroused during fiction reading may grow into self-reflection at leisure, in contrast to self-conscious emotions that occur during the wear and tear of our action-driven daily life.

This does not, however, fully answer the question of whether fiction reading has a stronger influence on self-reflection than other activities that can be performed when the subject is at rest. What is the difference, in this respect, between fiction reading and patiently listening to a tale of woe presented by a friend? Here, it is interesting to examine more of the features of fiction reading listed above.

Risk-free imagination

When we read a fictional story, our imagination gathers associations and memories along the way to help fill the gaps in the story as it is told, to ‘generate fictional truths’.³⁷⁰ As examined in section 3.1, the reader has the opportunity to imagine situations and actions which she would not sanction in real life. One of the reasons for this is that imagining an action is different from performing an action. When I imagine doing something, I entertain the thought, I may even picture myself performing the action, but I do not perform it in real life, and thus do not take the responsibility for it. It is easy to explain that I do not take the responsibility for my imagined action socially; after all, nobody looks into my imagination, I am unwatched, on my own. Regarding my personal value system, there is, however, still a responsibility I may have to shoulder; I may consider some actions to be so morally reprehensible that I forbid myself even to imagine them. Or alternatively I may – as we saw in the discussion of imaginative resistance in section 3.1 – accept the outrageous action of a character(f) as fictional and imagine it, accompanied by a feeling of guilt.

Is fiction reading different in this respect from listening to a story a friend or acquaintance tells me about her life? Listening, I can still be ‘on my own’ in my imagination, there is no obligation for me to give away my thoughts. But there is a disrupting element which is missing in fiction reading. When I listen to someone, I am in a dialogue situation with an other. Even if the other person talks at length, and I only

³⁷⁰ Walton 1990, 184.

listen, I am aware of the presence of the other, and the social relationship between us. Whatever I imagine when I listen to her story will typically be studded with references to our relationship. The emotions I have towards her as a person who has been playing a role in my life, in combination with my own prejudices, will distort my perception. For instance, when I read about Stoner's unhappy marriage, I am touched by the tragedy of the situation. I have a suspicion, though, that if I had an acquaintance who had a similar character as Stoner, and he would tell me about his wife, I would secretly think 'why doesn't he pull himself together and get a divorce'. The everyday life urge to solve problems instead of dwelling on them would probably prevent me from imagining the full situation. I cannot shut off this urge completely because it is part of my lived self which is in the process of listening. Thus, my imagination is likely to be more focussed than in fiction reading, but less rich.

Motivation to empathize

There is still one difference to discuss: Is there a difference between fiction reading and non-fiction reading regarding the evocation of self-conscious emotions?

This is not an easy question to answer because there are many cases where fiction and non-fiction overlap. There may be some clear-cut opposites – Nussbaum, for instance, distinguishes between novels and traditional forms of philosophical writing in this context. Novels, she says, 'enlist the reader as a participant by sympathy and compassion', whereas philosophical texts typically 'ask the reader to be wary and sceptical'.³⁷¹

In these clear-cut cases, the intention of the work is either to tempt the reader into emotional engagement, or to tempt her to analyze a problem rationally. As we all know, however, even the most 'traditional' philosophical literature contains many instances where the reader is lured into believing something by having her emotions touched through the polemics of the author. The emotional involvement of the reader can be compassion or revulsion. For instance, when Schopenhauer describes the 'common man' as 'factory-made',³⁷² I feel my blood boiling at this contempt for humankind.

³⁷¹ Nussbaum 1990, 238.

³⁷² Schopenhauer 1970, 174.

Other works of non-fiction function in a different way, achieving a similar result as works of fiction. For instance, historical or political books often contain personal stories of historical or living persons, inviting the reader to empathize with these persons.

So if fiction and non-fiction cannot be clearly separated from each other regarding style or intention, what can be the difference regarding their capacity of generating self-conscious emotions?

There are two aspects here which create a dissimilarity. First, the reader engages with a work of fiction with a different expectation than she would have towards a work of non-fiction. As Lamarque puts it, the reader is invited to ‘attend to the story with a reader protocol that can be dubbed ‘the fictive stance’’, and this fictive stance regards the whole work, not only parts of it.³⁷³ This implies that the reader of fiction expects to have the licence to let her imagination run free, without worrying about any links the work might have towards the real world. Reading Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, I can sit back comfortably and imagine interesting pictures of a farmhouse which is torn off the ground by a tornado. If, on the other hand, I read a feature article about people suffering from a real-life tornado in the newspaper,³⁷⁴ I might get worried about my fellow human beings, and wonder whether I can make a donation to help them. So with fiction, we feel assured that our current real-life worries can stay outside. The same applies to historical works, with a caveat: if I find out that a historical work deals with one of friends or family members, my emotional involvement with the text will not only be evoked by imaginings, but will cover the area of my actual daily cares as well.

The second aspect is also connected with reader expectations. When we read a work of fiction, we usually assume that the fictional characters were constructed to emphasize typical problems of the human situation. If a work of non-fiction contains characters, we expect them to be drawn from real life, having been shaped by contingencies. Ricoeur picks up this point and says (with Aristotle) that fictional stories

³⁷³ Lamarque 2014, 20.

³⁷⁴ The difference between knowing and seeing is certainly one of the influencing factors on empathy in real life, as this example from G. B. Shaw’s *St. Joan* illustrates: ‘CAUCHON. Were not the sufferings of our Lord Christ enough for you?’

DE STOGUMBER. No. Oh no: not at all. I had seen them in pictures, and read of them in books, and been greatly moved by them, as I thought. But it was no use: it was not our Lord that redeemed me, but a young woman whom I saw actually burned to death. It was dreadful: oh, most dreadful. But it saved me.” (Shaw 1924, Epilogue).

However, the investigation of the influence of actual seeing on empathy goes beyond the scope of my work.

‘reveal universal aspects of the human condition’, whereas historical stories depend on anecdotic aspects of a particular life.³⁷⁵ If we do indeed expect this, we are inclined to take the outlined conflict in a fictional story more seriously. It is debatable in which cases the reader approaches the work of fiction with the explicit wish to learn more about the human situation; but if she does, this point is likely to influence her tendency to experience self-conscious emotions.

Having discussed the influence of fiction reading on the generation of self-conscious emotions in contrast to other means of information-gathering, I will now proceed to investigate how self-conscious emotions grow in the three different kinds of narrative that are typically developed during fiction reading with participation.

‘Self-conscious’ emotions from the other-narrative

A typical emotion that can be evoked by the other-narrative in fiction reading is sympathy. Reading Toni Morrison’s novel *Home*³⁷⁶, I feel intense sympathy with Cee who is submitted to painful experiments by the unscrupulous doctor she works for. My feeling towards Cee never turns into empathy, as she is always presented from the outside, as a fragile human being who is not even fully aware of the evil things she is submitted to, who is too weak to stand up for her basic human rights. Through my feeling for her I become more conscious of the suffering of women in real life, in particular of women who are ill-treated and mutilated with the approval of the society they live in. This sympathy creates a new self-conscious emotion in its wake: I am likely to feel guilty about not doing enough for women’s rights outside my own social environment. If my guilt is strong enough, it may persist after the reading process, inclining me to find out more about the situation of underprivileged women, and adding to my motivation to re-examine my life in order to get rid of this feeling of moral failure, and to act in a way that I feel I am following the moral standards that I endorse.

So my original simulated sympathy for Cee spawns a chain of subsequent real emotions and desires: sympathy with disadvantaged women, shame about my own lack of concern as shown in my life so far, and a desire to better myself. Depending on the degree of sympathy I feel for a character(f), my subsequent motivation may or may not be strong enough to lead to action; but if there was a follow-up incident in my real life

³⁷⁵ Ricoeur 2011, 427.

³⁷⁶ Morrison 2013.

(for instance listening to a mistreated woman talking about her experience at a literary event), I might be more inclined to react with interest and sympathy than I would have been without the previous reading experience. Sympathy for a character(f) directs the reader's attention to pitiable human situations that occur in real life.

Shame, the self-conscious emotion in my example, is a follow-up emotion, brought about indirectly by engagement with the other-narrative. It is triggered by the experience of sympathy. As Michael Lewis points out, a person can feel shame (or any other self-conscious emotions) only if she possesses the 'mental representation of a "me" or self-reflected awareness',³⁷⁷ so having this emotion is already the first step of a self-reflective process which may lead to a refiguration of the self-narrative.

'Self-conscious' emotions from the self-in-other-narrative

The self-in-other-narrative involves empathy with a character(f) which feels 'real' and life-like to me because I have integrated my own experiential memories into the narrative. These memories bring their own stories with them, inducing me to have imaginings alongside the story simulation that is mandated by the text. I myself am the target of the emotions which I feel during the unmandated imaginings, although I appear to be inside the character(f), and the role that I play can be quite different from any role I would take on in real life.

In *Stoner*, I feel for William Stoner from the inside when he has the opportunity to defend himself against his malevolent opponent Lomax and still remains fair and reasonable in the face of the most atrocious lies and accusations. Imagining the fights he has to go through, I remember my own conflicts with colleagues in the past, and how difficult it sometimes was to keep the fight clean. As a consequence, I admire Stoner (in place of any other person who can do this) for the ease with which he manages this, and this admiration is likely to continue after the reading process, urging me to focus on this kind of behaviour even more strongly. Before reading *Stoner*, I had not been aware that I was capable of reacting like this, and no tales of this behaviour featured in my self-narrative, although I now distinctly remember the related events of my past.

This is a special example of a domain-oriented feeling of self-esteem: pride of being able to maintain one's standards in a threatening social encounter. Similar

³⁷⁷ Lewis 2011, 1.

examples can be found for the other self-conscious emotions, like shame, embarrassment, or guilt. When reading Dickens' *Great Expectations*, I always cringe with shame in the parts where Pip attempts to deny his social origins in order to be accepted by polite society. I manage to empathize with Pip because he is successfully represented as a likable and very human character, and so it hurts me to find this fault in him. It hurts me all the more because in parallel, I have already assembled memories from my own youth when I felt a misplaced embarrassment about the countrified language of my kind and caring grandfather. The other-narrative has slipped into a self-in-other-narrative, and all my past instances of shame about my former misjudgement accumulate with the present one to such an extent that they overflow the reading process and carry on worrying me afterwards.

The main difference between the self-conscious emotions experienced within the self-in-other-narrative and the self-conscious emotions invoked through the other-narrative is one of distance, and thus intensity: in the other-narrative we only experience the self-conscious emotions on second thoughts, as a consequence of sympathy, but in the self-in-other-narrative our empathy with the character(f) can lead us deeply into ourselves, and into feeling for ourselves.

'Self-conscious' emotions from the other-in-self-narrative

In the other-in-self-narrative, a character(f) suddenly takes over my experiential memories and bends them into a different direction. An example for this is Edith Stoner, who is generally cast as one of the novel's flat characters but who occasionally shows outbursts of despair that are gripping and empathy-inciting. When Edith comes back from her father's funeral, she has changed into an aggressive outfit and into aggressive behaviour, starting what Stoner interprets as a 'new declaration of war'.³⁷⁸ While it is difficult to feel for Edith in the beginning of the novel when she seems to be just a vapid and dreamy person, she is now shown to be aware of the complete disappointment of all she thought life had to offer to her. This awareness engages the reader by its compelling fury. The belligerent Edith reminds me of my own broken relationships, of many acerbic publisher's rejections, and of the jobs I did not get. In my imagination, Edith now takes over my past life and runs it in a different way. She starts to do things in my

³⁷⁸ Stoner 2012, 117.

dug-up memories which I would have liked to do but never dared: accuse the head of the department of sexism during an award ceremony; demolish a faithless lover's favourite car; kick an obnoxious colleague down the stairs as an answer to an insult. Simulating this, I run through a series of emotions: satisfaction of at least imagining that I got my own back on people who did me wrong, followed by shame on delighting in something that I would not condone. Overall, it makes me aware of areas in my past life which I have not dealt with sufficiently from an emotional point of view, and which need my attention in retrospect.

My confusion about these mixed feelings is intensified by the memories of my own retributive actions in the past (on the occasions when I actually did fight back), which I 're-live' in parallel to the reading. This compound of emotions (current and remembered) constitutes an experience which challenges the practical identity I live with, and it motivates me to refigure my self-narrative in order to maintain a stable sense of self.

Summing up, the emotions that result from the three different kinds of narrative have several things in common: they are – in the end – all about myself, the reader. They can force me to recognize discrepancies between ways of dealing with a situation, and the way I have dealt with such situations in the past. As a result, I feel the need to either change my goals, or the way I interpret my past life, or both. These emotions differ in intensity: The emotions caused by the self-in-other-narrative are typically the strongest because they involve the most intense recalls of one's own emotion-laden memories during the reading process.³⁷⁹

7.2 *Self-examination*

In this section, I am going to examine under which circumstances the self-examination triggered by fiction-induced emotions can lead to a refiguration of the reader's self-narrative. Although I base my model on Ricoeur's account of fiction reading, I am going to develop two important amendments here: I am going to stress the experiential quality of the reading process which can generate strong self-conscious emotions, and I am going to stress the danger of self-reflection with a bias.

³⁷⁹ Experiences do, of course, differ from reader to reader. Some readers never feel empathy with a character(f), and hence do not create a self-in-other narrative at all.

If self-conscious emotions persist after the reading process, or emerge in the wake of other fiction-induced emotions, then – as we saw in the previous section – they typically lead to the reader’s awareness that her self-understanding, woven together as a self-narrative, does not stand the test of the actions / reactions which she imagined during her engagement with the text. This feeling of imbalance leads to a desire to put the self ‘back into kilter’, to re-establish a feeling of personal unity.

According to Ricoeur, this is done by consciously examining the imagined actions of the fiction-reading process and confronting them with one’s self-narrative. The resulting dialectic between counterfactual actions and the story one has woven about one’s own life will, upon self-reflection, lead to a revaluation of the self. During this revaluation process, new ideas and new goals will be introduced, and old ones will be either deepened or disabled. As Ricoeur puts it, there is a ‘play of sedimentation and innovation applied to our understanding of ourselves’.³⁸⁰

This thought suggests that self-reflection is a reliable tool to achieve self-unity and self-respect. Ricoeur holds that fiction reading helps to investigate and try out one’s own action in a non-threatening environment, thus receiving a wealth of self-testing material in a non-threatening environment.

Following a similar train of thought, Nussbaum says that novels can distance us ‘from blinding personal passions’ and cultivate ‘those that are more conducive to community’,³⁸¹ and that novels also enable readers to give way to self-indulgence without harming real people. So, if this is right, reading has two good influences on us: It makes us reconsider our past and present actions from an ethical point of view, and it purges us from anti-social urges.

Suzanne Keen conducted an experiment with her students, giving them three texts that were aimed at the reader’s emotions, all of them written in the first person, from the point of view of a down-at-luck orphan: a fraudulent email from Africa asking for a bank transfer, a hand-written letter with an attached report card asking for money, and a fictional text where the orphan character talks about her dreams of becoming a mechanic. A common factor of the students’ reactions to these texts was that they thought the fictional text was the most trustworthy.³⁸² Keen sums up the results of her study like this: ‘My research suggests that readers’ perception of a text’s fictionality

³⁸⁰ Ricoeur 2011, 437.

³⁸¹ Nussbaum 1990, 240.

³⁸² Keen 2010, 32.

plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through scepticism and suspicion. Thus they may respond with greater empathy to an unreal situation and characters because of the protective fictionality, but still internalize the experience of empathy with possible later real-world responsiveness to others' needs'.³⁸³

Is fiction reading then always good for us, turning us into more empathetic persons, and restoring our self-esteem? When we look at the people who are part of our social circle, it soon becomes obvious that some avid fiction readers are not as socially capable as such a claim might lead us to expect. This suggests that some further prerequisites that must be met for the chain process that leads from strong self-conscious emotions to self-reflection, and from self-reflection to self-refiguration, to be successful. Another question is: what happens to the reader who only reads fiction in order to be transported into the story and to enjoy the ride – does self-reflection enter this process at all? Is, in short, reading good for people who do not manage, or do not look for, self-reflection?

In my view, the value of reading for the reader's unity of self depends (among other factors) on the quality of her self-narrative. Even though a self-narrative is typically only accessible to the self-narrator, not to the external world, it can have similar attributes as fictional narratives. As discussed in section 2.4, I adopt Ricoeur's view that we (unconsciously) use our self-narrative as a practical guideline to cope with the necessity to act and react in our daily lives. If we are not very discerning in our observation of the people in our social nexus, our self-narrative can be built on simple (and often idealized) lines. Hence, I find it useful to distinguish between literary fiction and genre fiction even in self-narratives.

There are many common language distinctions between these two, with a huge grey area where they seem to overlap, so I shall use my own definition. I shall take literary fiction to be a fictional narrative that has the main objective of illuminating the human situation, without diminishing this aim by obeying normative generic conventions. In my definition, genre fiction has the main goal of providing stereotyped roles which are easy to recognize, and differentiated insights into the human situation take a subordinate role, only helping to make the story convincing.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Keen 2006, 220.

³⁸⁴ <https://www-cambridge-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-narrative/genre/3566843F21A944A5B50458C49FE562F4>.

The objective of genre fiction is to provide the reader with easily recognizable types of character(f) and easily recognizable story patterns, thus achieving some, but not necessarily all of these three goals: giving the reader the pleasure of finding something that is familiar to her; making the reader feel instantly at home in the story; making the reader pleased with herself by echoing and confirming her values. None of these goals is likely to make the reader conscious of a conflict in her life while she is within the reading process, and the main emotion to be expected in the reader is a mild feeling of contentment.³⁸⁵ Hence, self-reflection is only likely to happen if the reader engages with a work of fiction that represents genuine conflicts of the human situation.

What happens if the reader's self-narrative resembles a piece of genre fiction, consisting of clichéd story lines? If a person manages to keep her self-narrative on simplified lines, without much discernment of social conflicts, she is likely to cherry-pick the items of the fictional story that fit her expectations, and ignore potentially difficult story parts. Thus, I hold that self-reflection can only happen, and subsequent self-figuration can only lead to a stable sense of self, if the reader's self-narrative has the nature of literary fiction, as opposed to genre fiction.

A genre-based self-narrative is usually biased, giving undue weight to some characteristics of the self and her life, while ignoring other aspects. I am going to discuss the problem of genre in fiction and in self-narrative in detail in the course of this section.

Self-reflection and unity of self

As discussed in the previous section, self-conscious emotions have a tendency to persist after the reading process because they create a sense of imbalance in us which is perturbing. As we saw in section 1.9, shame, embarrassment, guilt or even pride can make us feel that we are playing the wrong role, in a current situation, or in our self-narrative, or in both. They force us to recognize a conflict, and they motivate us to reflect on our life and on the way we have presented it to ourselves up to the present.

³⁸⁵ Even being frightened by Stephen King horror novel, or crying over Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, eventually leaves us with this feeling of contentment, a bit like digesting a spicy but satisfactory meal. What can be objected is that indulging in genre fiction that reinforces existing delusions can make real life unbearable to the reader afterwards (as in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, for instance). In such a case, however, fiction reading is not likely to trigger self-reflection: the real life appears to be wrong to the reader, not her self-narrative.

How do we deal with fiction-induced emotions when we reflect on our lived self, and our self-narrative? Depending on the strength and the valence of the emotion, there are three possibilities.

The first possibility is that the emotion challenges our ethical values so much that we stop the reflective process as soon as we feel the onslaught. The most likely source for this would be a violent negative emotion generated during the generation of the other-in-self-narrative. If – for instance – reading the wittily written erotic scenes in Gore Vidal’s *Myra Breckenridge*³⁸⁶ should cause me to imagine forcing sexual acts on an unwilling partner, the realization of this would be so horrible that I would not be able to bear the shame of it. The only possible reaction (short of abandoning the reading process) would be a strengthening of my current values, and an added line to my self-narrative saying something like ‘tends to get carried away by literature, but thoughts do not count’, thus stowing the problem away from further scrutiny.

The second possible case is that my emotions from fiction reading have made me suspect that in some aspect, I am a better or a worse person than I thought I was. I feel urged to replay parts of my self-narrative in comparison, going through a strict investigation of the past. If the self-scrutiny confirms my suspicion, and my self-conscious emotion is strong enough, the consequences are two-fold: I re-tell the past part of my self-narrative because I view some episodes in a different light now, and my future plans (which are also part of my self-narrative) take a slightly different turn.

The third possibility is the most subtle one, and it is most likely to occur in connection with the self-in-other-narrative. During fiction reading, my attention to the situation of characters(f) is different from the attention I pay to the situation of real persons in real life. When I empathize with a character(f), I enjoy a privileged situation because the text allows me to read her mind: on the one hand, I am intimately acquainted with the character(f), and I share memories, actions, and friends with her. On the other hand, I am the only person who is aware of this, and my reactions are entirely private and unobserved. I can think what I like without having to fear censorship or punishment from outside. This frees my mind of self-protective thoughts, and I can concentrate on the details of another person’s life, using an unfamiliar point of view, thus discovering aspects of life which I have not noticed before. Ricoeur calls this aspect of the reading process ‘an immense laboratory for thought experiments’,³⁸⁷ but I

³⁸⁶ Vidal 1993.

³⁸⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 159.

find Robinson's term 'sentimental education'³⁸⁸ more convincing because the fiction reading experience with participation has the quality of an emotional experiment (rather than a thought experiment). When I watch a character(f)'s moral evolvement, taking in the steps and the considerations made by this character, I may find them to be quite different from any I would have thought possible. The empathy I feel for the character(f), and for myself when I bolster the self-in-other-narrative with my own experiential memories, is enhanced by a feeling of surprise at having learned to look at life in a new way. The attention to new aspects of life learned during fiction reading may not always lead to strong self-conscious emotions, but it is likely to make the process of post-reading self-examination more discerning. Learning more about the development of other people's feelings enables me to weave finer threads into the cloth of my self-narrative.

These three variants of self-reflection have one thing in common: they serve to give the reader a stable sense of self, supported by a believable story, which helps her to tackle her daily conflicts.

Self-reflection after fiction reading does not, however, always behave in this ideal way. What can go wrong? I shall investigate the causes of non-functional self-reflection in the next section.

Self-reflection and bias

It is a well-known truism that self-reflection can only be as good as the mirror we watch ourselves in. How does this translate to fiction reading? What makes self-reflection as a result of fiction-induced emotions realistic and useful, and under which circumstances is self-reflection uncritical and self-serving?

I shall investigate two possible factors which can be responsible for a mirror distortion: the motivation of the reader when she chooses her fictional reading matter, and the quality of the reader's self-narrative.

Motivations for reading a work of fiction are similar for most readers, but differ in strength. Many readers choose a work of fiction in order to be entertained, to get out of their every-day drudgery into an unthreatening fictional world. Whereas some readers want to explore new worlds, others want the fictional world to be source of solace for

³⁸⁸ Robinson 2006, 156.

their own imperfect lives, providing them with dreams which are unlikely to come true in real life. If the need for the dream is too strong, the reader will not be able to assimilate the complete work of fiction, but only the parts of it that relate to the dream-story. This is, for instance, illustrated by the number of romantic comedies that were made on the basis of Jane Austen's sharp social novels; these films typically constitute visible versions of self-serving reading by extricating some sickly romance from the rich satire of Austen's writing.

Readers who engage with a work of fiction in order to fill a self-serving need tend to rewrite the other-narrative until it fits in with their expectations, if the text does not do comply with their wishes in a satisfactory way. The reader enters the story with a bias.

Can such a form of affirmative reading lead to self-reflection at all? For more than 2000 years, writers and philosophers have been concerned about the question whether books can have a beneficial influence on the reader. For instance, Diodorus Siculus writes in his *Library of History* that the 'sacred library' of Thebes bears the inscription 'Healing-place of the Soul'³⁸⁹ – we do not know, of course, how entertaining the books in this library were. The moral appreciation of fiction which was designed to please and entertain was a popular topic of discussion in the eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson professes lukewarm approval for books which aim at nothing but entertainment: 'The author is not wholly useless, who provides innocent amusements for minds like these. There are, in the present state of things, so many more instigations to evil, than incitements to good, that he who keeps men in a neutral state, may be justly considered as a benefactor to life'.³⁹⁰ Other intellectuals of the age were intrigued by the possibility of 'hiding' valuable insights in entertaining works of fiction. As Clara Reeve says in the introduction to her Gothic novel *The Old English Baron*: 'Romance displays only the amiable side of the picture; it shews the pleasing features, and throws a veil over the blemishes: Mankind are naturally pleased with what gratifies their vanity; and vanity, like all other passions of the human heart, may be rendered subservient to good and useful purposes'.³⁹¹

If I choose to read a work of fiction of which I am sure that it does not contain potentially troubling conflicts, which promises to be a 'feel-good novel', it is unlikely

³⁸⁹ Diodorus Siculus 60-30 BC, Book 1 paragraph 49.

³⁹⁰ Johnson 1754.

³⁹¹ Reeve 1802, A3/A4.

(although still possible) that my empathy with one of its characters evokes strong self-conscious emotions. For instance, reading John Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*³⁹² can lead me to empathize with Doc, but imagining his feeling of loneliness from inside only induces a slight and pleasant sentimentality in me. On the other hand, I enjoy the novel not only because the promised happy ending between Doc and Suzy comes to pass, but because the author's sympathetic observations of eccentric society drop-outs gives me the feeling of slowing down, of paying attention to details that pass me by in my real-life daily schedule. So even an intended affirmative reading can inadvertently lead to increased sensitivity, and thus to enrichment of the self-narrative, although it is unlikely to start a process of self-reflection.

The second area where a reader may be biased is her own self-narrative. As discussed earlier, the narrative self is a practical self. It enables a person to interact with others, and to make decisions in small or big conflicts. If the self-narrative does not reflect the role a person plays in her real-life social environment, these interactions are bound to fail, leading to social clashes. For example, if I think I am a woman of stupendous beauty, expecting the people I meet to gaze at me admiringly, and ask for my autograph, they will be baffled or amused when they recognize my expectation, but they are not likely to meet it. To resolve the resulting conflict, the person acting outside her social role can undertake one of three possible actions: first, ignore these failures and classify them as unimportant; second, blame others for failing to perceive her admirable attributes; third, question her own self-assessment and behaviour. Assuming that a person is free in her choices and in full possession of her powers, selecting the third option could be termed the safest response because it spares her unnecessary fights in her social environment. Choosing options one and two (without having tried option three first) typically leads to a mismatch between the person's self-narrative and her real-life self which needs to be bridged by fabrications. In this case, the person would be likely to follow what Peter Goldie calls 'fictionalizing tendencies', especially the tendency to impose genre on the self-narrative in a dangerous way.³⁹³ Regarding my assumed (but unacknowledged) beauty, I might imagine that I am a modern Cinderella, whose beauty can only be discovered by a modern Prince Charming who has yet to appear.

³⁹² Steinbeck 2000.

³⁹³ Goldie 2012, 169.

As another example, a recalcitrant ten-year-old girl might convince herself that her mother's scolding and her schoolfellows' jeering are not to be taken seriously because they just fail to see that she has been sadly neglected and misunderstood by her own family, and that she is entitled to eccentric behaviour and bad temper to make up for ill-treatment. In such a case of biased self-narrative, reading a book like Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*³⁹⁴ might strengthen the girl's misconception of herself. She would empathize with Mary Lennox and look for similarities between Mary and herself, while tending to ignore the differences. As Michael S. Brady says, 'subjects often seek for reasons that confirm, rather than disconfirm, their initial emotional construals', making themselves 'susceptible to a 'confirmatory bias'.³⁹⁵ The reading process would probably evoke an enhanced self-conscious feeling of pride in the girl, a glorious feeling of being different and hence superior to others, and subsequent self-reflection would increase the biased genre-like character of her self-narrative.

A biased self-narrative will present an image of a unified self to the subject, but in contrast to a reality-based self-narrative, it is not only fragile, but also rigid. It cannot prove or disprove itself by social encounters. In such cases, the bias-driven version of self-reflection will not be likely to amend the real unity of the self, or to allow any additional discernment.

As shown in this section, self-reflection is even possible – in a very limited way – if a reader chooses a work of fiction that is suitable for affirmative reading. If, however, the self-narrative of the reader is already biased and unrealistic, any self-reflection after the reading process is likely to sharpen the problem instead of paving the way towards a stable sense of self-unity.

In this chapter, I discussed two issues: first, the possibility that reading-induced emotions persist after the reading process, triggering self-reflection, and second, the question of whether self-reflection is always good for us. I arrived at the conclusion that fiction reading with empathy for a character(f) can invoke self-conscious emotions, and that self-conscious emotions are particularly likely to lead to self-reflection. Regarding the self-reflection process itself, I argued that this can only help us towards an improved unity of self if our self-narrative does not deviate too much from the role we play in our social nexus.

³⁹⁴ Burnett 2018.

³⁹⁵ Brady 2013, 162.

8 Filling out Ricoeur's account of fiction reading

In the previous two chapters, I developed my own account of how fiction reading and personal identity are interlaced through narrative: first, during the reading process, and second, as a consequence of the reading process.

Here, I am going to highlight the lacunae in Ricoeur's account of fiction reading in connection with narrative identity and explain how these are filled with my own account. As I explained earlier, the lacunae are located in these areas:

1. during fiction reading, in the influence of imaginative variations on the reader's self, in particular on the reader's emotions; and
2. after fiction reading, in the role of reflection during the refiguration of narrative identity.

In the detailed discussion, I am also going to compare relevant parts of Ricoeur's account with Walton's account of engaging with a work of fiction.

Before I start to investigate these points in detail, I would like to give an overview of Ricoeur's main claims regarding the effects of fiction reading on the reader:³⁹⁶

Reading fictional texts provides the reader with imaginative variations of her self to gain understanding and try out new perspectives on life. The reader who engages with a work of fiction enters the fictional world evoked by this work. Her reading process is accompanied by a dialectic with the inferred author³⁹⁷: her own expectations of how the text should be interpreted are continually challenged by the inferred author who wants to seduce the reader towards viewing the world in a specific way. The reader deals with this challenge by appropriating the fictional world in her own way: she merges her own experiential and cultural horizon with the horizon offered by the inferred author, thus experiencing imaginative variations of her self in a low risk environment. To be able to do this, she must first relinquish her self and then playfully adopt a new understanding of the world as offered by the text: 'to understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation'.³⁹⁸ Ricoeur calls this

³⁹⁶ For the full account, see section 1.7 'Narrative and Mimesis'.

³⁹⁷ Ricoeur uses the term 'implied author' but his arguments show that he means what I call the 'inferred author'.

³⁹⁸ Ricoeur 1991a, 87.

activity mimesis₃.³⁹⁹ During mimesis₃, the reader experiences passive contemplation (aísthēsis). In connection with ‘the readers’ tendency to identify with the hero’⁴⁰⁰ this can lead to confrontation with unknown norms and, finally, to catharsis. ‘Aesthetism frees the reader from everyday concerns, catharsis sets the reader free for new evaluations of reality that will take shape in rereading’.⁴⁰¹ Catharsis typically has three effects on the reader: purging of pent-up or hidden emotions, subsequent clarification of the conflicts in the fictional story, and learning from the newly gained insights. Learning leads to reflection on the reader’s own conflicts and to refiguration of the reader’s self-narrative.

I am going to explore the overlappings and the differences between Ricoeur’s account and mine in the following areas:

Reading process step	No.	Topic
1 During the reading process: Engagement with a work of fiction with participation	a	What happens when I identify with a character(f) from within?
	b	What happens when I follow a fictional story?
	c	Do my imaginations belong to the fictional story?
	d	How are my emotions evoked during fiction reading?
	e	Do my reading-induced emotions persist?
2 After the reading process: Reflection after the reading process	a	How is reflection triggered?
	b	Does reflection move my self towards an improved unity of life?
	c	Does reflection refigure my self-narrative?

Figure 4: Reading process Ricoeur 1

³⁹⁹ See section 1.7.

⁴⁰⁰ Ricoeur 1985, 176.

⁴⁰¹ Ricoeur 1985, 176.

1a) What happens when I identify with a character(f) from within?

Ricoeur's concept of fiction reading is based on the view that a fiction reader actualizes the text by reading it. When this actualization is successful, it entails two main reader activities: first, tuning her own expectations into those which are raised by the text (which is represented by the inferred author), and second, entering the fictional world. The reader has to find a way of accepting the fictional text as conceivable, and if she is able to do this, she can appropriate the text. Appropriation means that the reader relinquishes her self and accepts the fictional world, 'receiving, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself'.⁴⁰² In other words, the reader lets go of all her current emotions and the preoccupations with her daily life before accepting and engaging with the fictional world proposed in the text. By appropriating the text in this way, the reader releases the revelatory power of the text: she allows herself to be carried off towards the reference of the text.⁴⁰³

I agree with the gist of Ricoeur's account here. However, I hold that he does not pay enough attention to the different degrees of appropriation which a fiction reader can attain.

In his explanation, Ricoeur does not distinguish between the acceptance of the fictional world and the identification of the reader with a character(f) from within. For him, the identification with a character(f) is included in the general appropriation of the text by the reader. Appropriation of the text opens the way to *aísthēsis* (passive contemplation) and *catharsis* (the purging of emotions as a step towards learning). Ricoeur does not see the need to make further distinctions in his definition of appropriation.

As I discussed in section 6.1, valuable additional insights can be gained by distinguishing three levels of reader participation: appreciation, sympathy and empathy. I hold that the level of reader participation is an important factor in the development of the reader's emotions during and after the reading process. As we shall see later, Ricoeur does not explore the reader's emotions after the reading process. I shall argue that in my view, this omission leads to a gap in Ricoeur's account of how fiction reading can influence the reader's narrative identity.

⁴⁰² Ricoeur 1991a, 94.

⁴⁰³ Ricoeur 1991a, 95.

Let us examine an example: how would Ricoeur account for the reader's attitude towards the important fictional characters in the first pages of the novel *Stoner*?

As a start, we must determine who the significant characters(mf) and characters(f) in this *Stoner* chapter are. There are two obvious candidates: the inferred author, and Stoner himself. The inferred author, although outside the narrative, pushes himself into the foreground by describing the protagonist's life in disparaging terms. He stresses that 'few of Stoner's students remembered him with any sharpness' and draws attentions to the fact that Stoner's colleagues 'held him in no particular esteem when he was alive'.⁴⁰⁴ Everything the inferred author says about Stoner is calculated to rouse the reader's fervid protest. We feel that the life of a human being should not be so cursorily dismissed by those around him.

Ricoeur would say that this style of writing is an example of the seductive strategy of the real author who is trying to make the reader identify with the inferred author. For Ricoeur, the reading process is a dialectic between the author, who wants the reader to identify with the inferred author and his views, and the reader, who reacts with either willingness or suspicion.⁴⁰⁵ In *Stoner*, the inferred author belittles his protagonist on purpose, as if saying: 'This is how the world sees Stoner, but I, the author, and you, the reader, are aware that there is more richness in a human being'. For most readers, the seduction would work: the reader goes along with the inferred author's opinions. It is, of course, possible to imagine a different type of reader: a person with a strong prejudice against formal education might think that someone working at university was over-privileged in any case, and thus deserved to be spoken of badly.

I agree that the ongoing struggle of the reader with the text is an important feature of fiction reading. As Ricoeur says, the inferred author 'attempts to make the reader identical with himself'.⁴⁰⁶ However, Ricoeur describes this as nothing more than an intellectual and aesthetic exercise. For him, emotions do not play a major role in the dialectic between the author and the reader. I disagree with Ricoeur here on two counts: first, I hold that emotions play an important role in the reader's acceptance of a text, and second, I think that the term 'dialectic' is not the best description of the interaction of the reader with the text.

⁴⁰⁴ Williams 2012, 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Ricoeur 1985, 176.

⁴⁰⁶ Ricoeur 1988, 178.

In the *Stoner* example, the inferred author seduces me into rooting for Stoner by making me angry about the world's disregard of Stoner's life. I feel compassion towards an unknown protagonist, and I am happy to share the inferred author's ethical position. Imagining the inferred author from within is only possible in a restricted area: the focus of his perception and, strongly connected with this, his ethical judgments. In most cases, I do not know enough about the inferred author and his life to imagine being like him. However, I can imagine sharing his judgments, seeing the world in the way that he does. If I imagine this, two things typically happen: I feel more confident about the fictional world he describes, and I feel more confident about my own tastes and moral standards because he shares them. Agreeing with the inferred author pleases me because my own judgements are backed up by an authority whom I classify as important. If, on the other hand, I cannot imagine sharing the inferred author's judgements because I find them silly or objectionable, I feel disgusted with the inferred author and with the readers who liked or praised the book. For instance, when I read Marie Corelli's description of the centre of the world⁴⁰⁷ in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, I feel sickened by her tawdry taste, and I despise Queen Victoria's taste in literature. As these examples show, emotions are likely to be involved in the reader's struggle with the inferred author.

The struggle is, however, one-sided, and hence, I think that 'dialectic' is not the appropriate word for it. The reader works her way through the text, and during this journey she is repeatedly challenged by the inferred author. Does the inferred author represent the fictional world in a way that is conceivable to me, the reader? If he does not, can I imagine the missing links to make the story acceptable to me, or does the story remain alien to me even when I stretch my imagination?

The real author designed his text, including the inferred author, with a view to making the reader react in a certain way, and he probably had an ideal reader in mind when he wrote the text. But there is no way the inferred author can react if the reader interpreted the text in a different way than the author designed. The inferred author is deaf and blind towards the reader; he cannot formulate honed arguments to set against the reader's non-compliant conceptions. The text is fixed; only the reader's reactions are flexible. As the process is one-sided, I hold that 'rhetoric' and 'struggle' are better

⁴⁰⁷ 'What I beheld was a Circle, so huge that no mortal measurements could compass it – a wide Ring composed of seven colours, rainbow-like, but flashing with perpetual motion and brilliancy', Corelli 1973, 189/190.

descriptions for this. The reader struggles with ways of processing the inferred author's rhetorical devices, adjusting her own understanding of the story. Even if we take into consideration that the reader's perception of the inferred author might change during the process, there would be no additional input from the text. The reader would argue with her own understanding of the text and its author, learning from the text, but the text cannot react to the reader's changed understanding.

So far, we have looked at the reading process in view of the reader's identification with the inferred author. This is a special case of identifying with a character(mf). We usually know very little about the inferred author, and we cannot take part in his story because it is hidden from us. The situation is different when the reader identifies with a character(f). In this case, the reader knows enough about the character(f)'s life story, current situation and innermost thoughts to be able to imagine being in her place and feeling like her.

Ricoeur says that identification with a character(f) guides the reader towards catharsis, the cleansing of her emotions. The reader revisits the conflicts of her own life through the actions and sufferings of the character(f). Reliving the emotions which are already known to her through another person frees the reader from pent-up and concealed emotions. Thus released from emotional baggage, the reader is able to see the relevant situation under new aspects, and to consider moral standards that were previously hidden from her. Catharsis opens the way towards clarification, examination and learning. For Ricoeur, this is the goal and the end of fiction reading, and no further reading-induced emotions from the reader's side need to be investigated: '*Aísthēsis* frees the reader from everyday concerns, catharsis sets the reader free for new evaluations of reality that will take shape in rereading'.⁴⁰⁸ The vessel is emptied of emotional muddle and can be filled with instruction. As I shall explain in the course of this chapter, I see the development of emotions during fiction reading in a more differentiated way. Contrary to Ricoeur, I do not use the term 'catharsis' to describe what happens to our emotions during fiction reading. For me, identifying with a character(f), trying to feel like her, cannot be fully represented by a linear process like catharsis. Empathy with a character(f) triggers an ongoing development of emotions during the reading process. Among these emotions, reliving a conflict of the past can be one element of many, and the chain of emotions usually does not end there. Re-

⁴⁰⁸ Ricoeur 1988, 176.

experiencing emotion-charged episodes of one's own life during fiction reading triggers follow-up emotions which are usually self-reflective. Reading *Stoner*, for example, I enjoy reading about Edith's brutal destruction of her dolls, feeling for her from the inside. Immediately afterwards I feel guilty about condoning unleashed hatred by identifying with a character(f) who indulges in it without restraint. Then, afterwards, I feel slightly silly about censoring my imagination, and the chain of emotions may even continue after that. The emotions I go through during this process are typically self-conscious.

There is no direct line from experiencing a strong emotion through fiction reading to learning from fiction reading. The reader does not just re-live emotions from her own life through the character(f). Identifying with a character(f) brings new memories and existing conflicts to the surface without resolving them during the reading process. This happens by association of situation patterns, below the level of consciousness, without any determined action on the reader's part. Part of the resulting muddle may be cleared when the reader re-lives a conflict from her own life through fiction reading, but some remains, some is created during the new experience of the conflict itself. New messy emotions typically emerge during reading and the imaginings which accompany the reading process.

Unlike Ricoeur, I have argued that the reading process is more complex than a simple struggle of the reader with the inferred author, and most importantly, that the reader's identification with a character(f) from within is more than a simple road towards catharsis. As discussed in section 6.1, I claim that empathy with a character(f) generates a network of complex new emotions in the reader. Hence, my account provides a basis for explaining the persistence of different kinds of emotions, which is lacking in Ricoeur's account.

1b) What happens when I follow a fictional story?

Ricoeur does not examine in detail what happens to the reader when she identifies with a character(f). He states that the reader undergoes imaginative variations of his ego by trying the role and the story of the character(f).⁴⁰⁹ Ricoeur calls the reader's engagement with a work of fiction 'appropriation': the reader relinquishes her own self and receives

⁴⁰⁹ Ricoeur 1991a, 94.

‘as in play, the self conferred by the work itself’.⁴¹⁰ When a reader relinquishes her own self as part of the engagement with a work of fiction, Ricoeur claims, she is freed from her narcissistic ego and her real-world concerns. Appropriation thus reveals new modes of being to the reader, giving her fresh capacities for knowing herself.

Ricoeur’s view that the reader plays a game with the text during fiction reading is similar to Walton’s view of fiction reading as a game of make-believe. Walton says that readers are reflexive props in games of make-believe who generate fictional truths about themselves,⁴¹¹ which is compatible with Ricoeur’s notion that ‘the reader is invited to undergo an imaginative variation of his ego’.⁴¹² When Ricoeur talks about the struggle between the inferred author and the reader, the strategy of seduction versus the strategy of suspicion, he implies that there are two worlds, the world suggested by the inferred author and the world imagined by the reader. This is compatible with Walton’s definition of the work world and the appreciator’s game world.⁴¹³ Unlike Walton, however, Ricoeur does not distinguish between the different levels of imagining that take place within the reader’s world. He does not differentiate imaginations which are part of the game prescribed by the text from imaginations which occur outside the prescribed game. As I am going to explain, I hold this to be a very important distinction. The differentiation of various strands of imaginings forms the basis for my own account.

I hold that Ricoeur’s focus on the reader’s activity of understanding a text, and applying it playfully to herself, does not shed full light on the reading experience. Identifying with a character from within often evokes emotions in the reader, and these emotions lead the reader to either take on the part of the character(f) as an extension of herself on a concordant and presumably predictable path (albeit with some new vistas), or to let herself be led astray by an uncannily familiar, but ethically dubious character(f) on a precarious journey on thin ice. These different paths are the self-in-other-narrative and the other-in-self-narrative.⁴¹⁴ In the reader’s unconscious mind, an inner monitor, the doppelgänger-function, is always on the alert for indications of which path the reader should take. I take this doppelgänger function to be a socially developed mechanism that runs below the reader’s current level of consciousness.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Ricoeur 1991a, 94.

⁴¹¹ Walton 1990, 214.

⁴¹² Ricoeur 1991a, 91.

⁴¹³ Walton 1990, 58.

⁴¹⁴ See section 6.2.

⁴¹⁵ See section 6.2.

Ricoeur's account is much thinner regarding the reader's imaginings. About my example, he would just say that the reader appropriates the fictional world of *Stoner* and identifies with a character(f). Joyfully identifying with Stoner when he is sanding a wooden board with quiet enjoyment on one extreme, and reluctantly / guiltily travelling with Edith in her angry revenge against her husband on the other, belong to the same kind of activity for him, and thus, he does not investigate them separately. For me, these are two different kinds of story: the first becomes a self-in-other-narrative during reading, whereas the second develops into an other-in-self-narrative.⁴¹⁶ They provide different kinds of reading experience, and they typically generate different kinds of emotion in the reader.

In contrast to Ricoeur, I say that during the reader's own actualization of the fictional story, memory sequences of the reader's own life become part of the reading experience. As discussed in section 6.2, these memory sequences can dominate the reader's imagination of the story, or they can themselves be dominated by the influence of a character(f). These are the two extremes of the doppelgänger-function. Distinguishing between them enables me to examine whether these two paths lead to different possibilities of self-reflection after the reading process. I am going to say more about this under 2a).

1c) Do my imaginations belong to the fictional story?

Ricoeur says that it is constitutive for the self to be embodied, and thus anchored to the world. In his account of fiction reading, however, he claims that the reader leaves her self behind while appropriating the fictional world. This is a bold move, and it keeps him from investigating the connections between the reader's embodiment and her engagement with a work of fiction.

When Ricoeur talks about the reader's self here, he means the ipse, the lived self, to be distinguished from the idem, the objectified personal identity which includes character(p). Ricoeur acknowledges that the reader is cognizant of the features of her idem during the reading process, and that this influences the way she reads and understands the text: 'Insofar as the body as one's own is a dimension of oneself, the imaginative variations *around* the corporeal condition are variations of the self and its

⁴¹⁶ For a detailed discussion see section 6.2.

selfhood'.⁴¹⁷ What Ricoeur underestimates is the connection between the lived self and the reading process.

In my view, it is not accurate to say that the reader *relinquishes* her self when she enters a fictional world. I agree that she leaves her current concerns behind, but a basic self-awareness remains. A reader is still alert to phenomenological perceptions and able to react to them: if her leg becomes numb, she may change her position, and if she feels peckish, she may nibble a snack while continuing to read. In addition to that, she may be reminded of sensual experiences in her own past when she identifies with a character(f). When she enters the warm reception room together with Stoner, when the heat of the room almost pushes him back, she may recall how strange it can feel to enter a warm room coming in from the cold, and the context in which this happened to herself in the past. Ricoeur does not put enough emphasis on the sensory quality of experiential memories and the emotions which are linked to this. For him, the fiction-induced imaginative variations around the bodily condition merely serve to help the reader to identify with a character(f).

A basic self-awareness also remains on the level of social behaviour. A reader who identifies with Stoner in the scenes where Stoner is treated unfairly by his colleagues will feel the injustice not only for Stoner, but for herself, in all the remembered instances when she was in a comparable situation.

I hold that when a reader engages with a work of fiction, she does not leave her self, but rather her self-narrative behind. She enters the fictional narrative instead – but she retains access to her experiential memories which may be triggered by imagining a character(f) from within. These experiential memories form part of the reader's idem; the reader can retrieve them because they are rooted in her embodiment. As soon as she has recalled them, they form part of her ipse, her lived self, because they become part of the reading experience.

Unlike Ricoeur, I have explored in detail how the reader fills the gaps in the fictional story she engages with. Hence, I have been able to investigate the importance of experiential memories and the way they can influence the reading experience.

⁴¹⁷ Ricoeur 1992, 150.

1d) How are my emotions evoked during fiction reading?

For Ricoeur, identifying with a character(f) can lead a fiction reader towards catharsis. Catharsis purges the reader's emotions, and it teaches the reader to look at the world from a new angle by setting familiar conflicts into a new context. In his view, the cleansing process of catharsis sufficiently describes the reader's progress from reading to learning and, ultimately, self-reflection.

On my account, this explanation is not satisfactory, for two reasons. First, the emotions triggered by fiction reading (recognizing and re-living one's own troubles, or typically human troubles, in a character(f)) do not usually work in such a clear-cut way, and second, re-living a familiar conflict is not an end in itself: it triggers a chain of emotions in the reader. Identifying with a character(f), and recognizing similarities with emotion-charged occurrences in one's own life, calls up experiential memories in the reader which have a narrative quality. They are narrative because they recall an action and a subsequent emotional reaction, even if the sequence is short and simple. Feeling for Pincher Martin, I remember my childhood adventure of almost drowning, and fearing for my life as a consequence. In this way, experiential memories bring their own mini-stories to the consciousness of the reader. When I feel like Stoner sanding his board, I focus not only on the text; I gather memories of similar experiences in my own life. I may recall being allowed to paint my grandfather's garden fence as a child, how hot it was, and that my grandfather was collecting gooseberries for tea, and how the teacups were cracked and stained, how much my mother hated that and how strange and exciting it seemed to me, and how sorry I felt for my grandfather when she scolded him, and how guilty I felt about not defending him. All of these small details become part of my reading of *Stoner*, inextricably woven into the story, calling up new emotions directed towards my self.

Contrary to Ricoeur, for whom emotions are spent and purged during the reading process, my account allows for chains of new emotions, which are directed towards the reader's self, to be generated during the appropriation of a fictional story. As I shall show, this makes it more plausible that a reader is motivated to enter self-reflection at all.

1e) Do my reading-induced emotions persist?

For Ricoeur, the long-term effect of fiction reading on the reader develops because the reader learns something new through fiction reading. After experiencing catharsis, the reader realises that the world can be understood, and lived in, in a way which was previously not known to her. Ricoeur says: ‘to understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation’, and ‘Reading releases an event of discourse’.⁴¹⁸ For Ricoeur, emotions come into play at two stages of fiction reading: first, through empathy with a character(f), leading to (and ending with) catharsis; second, after learning something new by living in the fictional world, leading to feelings of puzzlement and wonder.

I hold that the emotions experienced through empathy with a character(f) which involve re-living a previously experienced conflict usually persist and create new emotions. In his understanding of catharsis, Ricoeur says that fiction reading can cause the reader to re-live old conflicts with a new perspective. I agree with this, but I hold that this is only the beginning of the story. The very process of experiencing a conflict again spawns emotions which are based on this experience. Two factors influence the generation of new emotions during reading: reliving a conflict from the past, and recalling experiential memories during empathy with a character(f). These emotions are freshly created by engaging with a work of fiction. They tend to be emotionally charged, both by the aftermath of catharsis and by the mini-stories which are brought to consciousness together with the experiential memories called up by the text. Therefore, they can persist after the reading process has finished, and thus have a strong influence on the mode of discourse about the work of fiction.

Hence – different from Ricoeur – I say that such newly created emotions are an important factor in explaining how fiction reading can lead us to self-reflection, and why the effects of fiction reading can haunt us in the way they often do.

Summing up the comparison of my account with Ricoeur’s view of the reading process, I say that it is different in three important respects. First, contrary to Ricoeur’s view that analysis of the reader’s emotions is limited to catharsis, I hold that fiction-invoked emotions often trigger a network of follow-up emotions. Second, I distinguish

⁴¹⁸ Ricoeur 1991a, 87.

the reader's imaginations which were mandated by the work of fiction from those which occur alongside the work of fiction. This is important because through the additional imaginations, the reader's self begins to enter the narrative. Third, I investigate the different ways in which a reader can identify with a character(f), and am thus able to investigate the different kinds of emotions connected with these modes of identification.

2a) How is reflection triggered?

As we have seen, some reflection can already be motivated by the reading process itself, but the more interesting question is whether the reading experience can lead to subsequent and deeper reflection, and eventually a refiguration of the reader's self-narrative. Ricoeur says that provocation from fiction reading induces the reader to reflect on her self-narrative. By 'provocation' he means an unforeseen confrontation with new insights and moral viewpoints. In principle, I agree with him here. However, the provocation process is more complex than Ricoeur allows. A new insight is not itself sufficient to trigger self-reflection – if it were, newspaper-reading would throw us into spells of self-reflection every day. In my view, the emotions which were invoked during fiction reading typically lead to subsequent self-reflection. This is more than a prod. As shown under 1a), fiction reading – and, in particular, empathizing with a character(f) – can trigger a chain of strong emotions in the reader, many of which are self-conscious. Self-conscious emotions are especially potent in disturbing the reader's peace of mind, making her reconsider the way she has been living. Emotions from fiction reading lead the reader towards reflection in a subtle way, on different levels: towards a situation-based moral decision, or towards a general moral lesson.

Having identified with Edith's revenge while reading *Stoner*, a reader would typically be torn between two emotions: empathy with Edith, her frustration and her rage about a life that has turned out to be completely empty and useless, on the one hand, and the ethical concern that what Edith does is deeply unfair and hurtful towards her husband, on the other hand. Identifying with Edith, one would slide into an emotional conflict that is not easy to resolve. Therefore, I hold that often, it is the gnawing sensation of one's own inner conflict – brought about by identifying with a character from within, in the other-in-self-narrative – which induces reflection after the reading process.

On a higher level, my change of attitude towards Edith can make me aware how easy it is to make biased moral judgments. At the beginning of the novel, I see Edith as a shallow and malevolent person who torments her husband. When I am allowed to look into her deep conflicts later on in the novel, at the part where her father dies and her life is shattered, I begin to see her as a person, and I am able to feel for her from the inside. I can take this change of attitude towards a character(f) as a warning for my real life of how easy it is to cast someone in a certain (and usually negative) role just because one does not know enough about them. It also reveals to me how dangerous it can be to feel deep empathy for someone – my empathy for Stoner leads me to be prejudiced against any other character(f) in the novel who harmed him. Having unexpected insight into Edith's sufferings put my judgement of her relationship with Stoner into a new perspective.

These examples show that self-reflection typically develops from emotions. The emotions make us aware of how important the unexpected information from fiction reading is for us and our lives. In an environment which does not call for immediate action, we can reflect on this and think about refiguring our self-narrative. As discussed in section 7.1, I argue – contrary to Ricoeur – that self-reflection can be triggered in different ways by the reader's complex emotions, and that a simple confrontation with new insight is not sufficient to explain the reader's motivation to self-reflect.

2b) Does reflection move my self towards an improved unity of life?

In Ricoeur's view, reflection can lead the reader to change her self and her self-narrative. A prerequisite for this is that the reader has been able to engage with the work of fiction and identify with a character(f) from within. For reflection to take place, the reader needs to reach a moment of impetus 'when reading becomes a provocation to be and act differently', and, in addition to that, this impetus is transformed to action by the decision 'Here I stand!'.⁴¹⁹ Ricoeur says that reading-induced reflection – if it occurs successfully – leads the reader to make a decision about her ethical responsibility, and thus about changing her commitments (her self) and her plans and her self-assessment (her self-narrative). For him, this reflection naturally leads the reader to better insight, and puts her on the way towards a more realistic self-narrative.

⁴¹⁹ Ricoeur 1985, 249.

In my view, the problem here lies in Ricoeur's explanation of how the reader finds an appropriate way to identify, and reflect upon, the text's suggestions to be and act differently. Ricoeur thinks that the only struggle the reader has is against the provocation of the text, deciding whether or not she will allow herself to be influenced by it.

I hold that there are further factors which influence the reader's ethical choices. These factors are not theoretical ethical considerations; they stem from the quality of reader's current self-narrative. If the reader's self-narrative complies with the facts of life as an external observer would perceive it in her social and physical environment, the reader will typically be able to identify with a character(f) in a way which is at least roughly similar to what the text prescribes. In this case, reflection is likely to lead the reader on the road to coping with her life even more successfully. If, on the other hand, the reader has delusions about herself and her life story, identifying with a character(f) may send her even deeper into her misconception about her life. Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*⁴²⁰ is a literary example of this. The eponymous heroine likes to read romances about elegant and noble men who lay the world at the feet of the woman whom they love. Identifying with the ardently adored women in such novels encourages Madame Bovary in her delusion that she is destined to live a life of passion and romance. She acts according to this delusion (following her erroneous self-narrative), and this does not help her towards a better unity of life. Instead, it leads her to ruin and suicide. Thus – contrary to Ricoeur – I say that an existing bias towards the unrealistic in a reader's self-narrative can have an influence on the success of her post-reading reflection.

2c) Does reflection refigure my self-narrative?

Ricoeur says that reflection, if successful, is usually followed by a decision to act and be differently, and thus to a refiguration of the reader's self-narrative, and towards an improved unity of life.⁴²¹

I agree with this, but I find it important to add that post-reading reflection is not always either successful or unsuccessful. As stated in the previous paragraph, reflection

⁴²⁰ Flaubert 2003.

⁴²¹ It is theoretically possible that my self-reflection leads to the conclusion that my life, and my self, are already as well-adjusted as they can be. But if this were the case, it does not seem plausible that I had fiction-induced emotions which led me to self-reflection.

can also lead to harmful results if it sets out from a biased self-assessment. In such a case, it can harden existing erroneous convictions about the reader's self and self-narrative, which is likely to lead to additional clashes and conflicts in her daily life.

So, contrary to Ricoeur, I hold that reflection can only refigure my self-narrative if my self-narrative does not deviate too much from my role in real life as perceived within my social nexus. If my current self-narrative is delusional, reflection after fiction reading can force this unrealistic narrative even further from any narrative of myself that an objective observer might construct. In this case one could say that my self-narrative is not refigured, but hardened.

In this chapter, I highlighted the differences between Ricoeur's account of how a reader's self-narrative can be influenced by fiction reading, and my own account. This is the summary of my investigations:

Reading process step	No.	Topic	Paul Ricoeur	My account
1 During the reading process: Engagement with a work of fiction with participation	a	What happens when I identify with a character(f) from within	Identifying with a character(f) from within leads to catharsis	Identifying with a character(f) from within leads to the development of complex emotions, many of them self-conscious
	b	What happens when I follow a fictional story?	Imaginative variations of the self, provocation to be or act differently	Other-narrative, self-in-other-narrative or other-in-self-narrative: the doppelgänger function
	c	Do my imaginations belong to the fictional story?	The horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text are fused	Experiential memories call up mini-stories that run alongside the fictional story

	d	How are my emotions evoked during fiction reading?	Catharsis purges pent-up emotions from real life	Complex emotions for the self emerge from identifying with a character(f) from within
	e	Do my reading-induced emotions persist?	Learning is possible because emotions are purged	Emotions persist till after the reading process, they make learning possible
2 After the reading process: Reflection after the reading process	a	How is reflection triggered?	Learning from fiction reading triggers reflection on self	Emotional conflicts from fiction reading trigger reflection on self
	b	Does reflection move my self towards an improved unity of life?	Decision on whether one's ethical outlook should change	Biased / non-biased decision on whether one's ethical outlook should change
	c	Does reflection refigure my self-narrative?	Refiguration of self-narrative	Refiguration or affirmation of self-narrative

Figure 5: Reading process Ricoeur 2

In particular, I pointed out that the emotions experienced during fiction reading, and the imaginings that occur alongside the ‘authorized’ game of make-believe, can have a strong influence on the emotional reactions of the reader, and that they may trigger a chain of new self-conscious emotions. This consideration is missing in Ricoeur’s account, and hence, he cannot give a convincing explanation of how and why the reader is motivated to reflect on her own life after fiction reading. For Ricoeur, catharsis and subsequent learning explain this motivation; for me, re-living conflicts of one’s past is just part of a complex web of self-directed emotions which emerge during the reading process.

I also showed that reading-induced self-reflection can take three forms: it can be successful, unsuccessful, or harmful in developing the reader’s self and self-narrative. In

comparison to Ricoeur, who only distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful self-reflection, leaving the harmful self-reflection unexamined, I am able to give a more discerning account of self-reflection.

9 Filling out Walton's account of fiction reading

In Part III of this work, I referred to Walton's account of fiction reading in two main contexts. First, I recalled his account of participation in a work of fiction when I laid out my own account of the mutual influences of fiction reading and narrative identity.⁴²² Second, I compared Ricoeur's view of the reading process with Walton's account of reading as a game of make-believe.⁴²³

In this chapter, I am going to address three points in Walton's account which appear to be open to questions. First, Walton's view of the reader's subsidiary imaginings does not address the role of the reader's experiential memories; second – connected with the first point – the reader's emotions should be investigated regarding subsidiary imaginings; third, the influence of fiction reading on the reader's life should be examined:

Reading process step	No.	Topic
1 During the reading process: Engagement with a work of fiction with participation	a	What part do subsidiary imaginings play during fiction reading?
	b	What are emotions during fiction reading like?
2 After the reading process: Reflection after the reading process	a	How does fiction reading contribute to our lives?

Figure 6: Reading process Walton 1

⁴²² See section 6.1.

⁴²³ See chapter 8.

1a) What part do subsidiary imaginings play during fiction reading?

Walton says that when a reader identifies with a character(f) from within, she engages in imaginings ‘that are not part of the authorized game but occur along with it’.⁴²⁴ He argues that this is necessary because the reader cannot be completely identical with a character(f), and thus has to use her imagination to fill some gaps in order to imagine being in the character(f)’s shoes. In Walton’s view, these imaginings are similar to those we undertake when we try to imagine a real person from within.

I wholly agree with Walton’s general concept of subsidiary imaginings. However, I hold that there remains more to be said about their sources and their consequences to explain the nature of the reader’s emotions. Subsidiary imaginings do not just attach themselves to the fictional narrative out of the blue; they are usually based on emotionally charged memories of the reader. In order to imagine a character(f) from inside, to know what it feels like to be him, I need to resort to my own experiential memories. These memories bring my own unresolved emotions from the past with them. Imagining William Stoner at the point of his story where he inadvertently becomes a good teacher stimulates me to recall scenes from my own life when I realized that I was doing something well which I did badly before. I may remember, for instance, how I used to ignore my grandmother’s constant complaints about not being able to go out on account of the bad weather until one day I took her for a walk and realized that she just needed someone to go with her and did not want to say so. Suddenly, I felt I was acting as a caring relative should act. As a result, I felt remorse about not having been attentive enough in the past, and this remorse hits me again during the reading of *Stoner*.

Usually, the memories we resort to in order to fill the gaps in fictional texts are charged with emotions; this is why they come back so easily to our consciousness. The memories we recall are embedded in their own stories, and these stories can evoke strong emotions in us when we live through them again during fiction reading. Hence, the subsidiary imaginings during fiction reading can have an influence on how emotions are generated in the reader, and whether they subsist after the reading process.

⁴²⁴ Walton 1990, 255.

This is an important point for my account because it explains how the reader typically develops a network of self-conscious emotions which can lead the way to self-reflection, and refiguration of the self-narrative.

1b) What are emotions during fiction reading like?

As we saw in section 3.1, Walton makes a clear distinction between the emotions we experience in real life and the emotions we experience during fiction reading when we identify with a character(f). During fiction reading, he claims, it is only fictional that we have emotions about a character(f). The feeling we experience is real, but it is different from an emotion we would feel in a similar situation in real life. To make the distinction clear, he coins the term ‘quasi-emotion’⁴²⁵. A quasi-emotion contains all the elements of an emotion except the cognitive element and the motivational element.⁴²⁶ Walton says that we care about the experience of having quasi-emotions,⁴²⁷ but he does not pay attention to any other kind of real-life emotion that can be evoked from empathizing with a character(f).

I claim that Walton underestimates the connection between the emotions which we fictionally have towards characters(f) and the emotions towards ourselves which we develop or recall when we identify with a character(f). ‘Caring’ about having quasi-emotions does not fully explain the strong emotions which can evolve during fiction reading. For instance, when I read how Stoner is misunderstood and tormented by Lomax, I remember how I myself was treated unfairly by my stepmother but was unable to get my own back without dropping my moral standards. I fictionally feel for Stoner, and I care about feeling for Stoner, it makes me feel like a responsible person who reflects on ethical issues. So far, I agree with Walton. But my emotions do not stop there – as a consequence of my experiential memories of how unjustly my stepmother denounced me in front of the family, I also feel for myself, I re-experience my unresolved hurt from long ago. Walton does not account for this kind of re-lived self-directed emotion in his theory of fiction reading. Although he holds that ‘virtually all of our imaginings are partly about ourselves’,⁴²⁸ he underestimates the impact of the self-directed emotions which can develop from quasi-emotions.

⁴²⁵ For a more detailed discussion see section 3.1.

⁴²⁶ Walton 1990, 196.

⁴²⁷ Walton 1990, 271.

⁴²⁸ Walton 1990, 28.

This gap in Walton's account has been recognized by Jerrold Levinson. He says that we should supplement Walton's account 'in such a way as to be more adequate to our abiding sense that at least in some cases or interactions, something is really going on emotionally, i.e., there are some real, and not just quasi, or make-believe, emotions involved in the situation as a whole'.⁴²⁹ Although Levinson appears to equate the terms 'quasi' and 'make-believe' here, which does not reflect Walton's views, the point he makes is true: in addition to emotions that are based on imagining that something is the case, fiction reading can also trigger emotions are based on a belief that something is the case. When an emotion is based on a belief, a quasi-emotion and some motivations are generated. Levinson suggests that there is a leakage between two levels, 'that of imaginative connection with the characters and that of half-remembered, dimly focussed recollections of stored life experiences'.⁴³⁰ The real-life emotions evoked by fiction reading are based on the beliefs about these stored life experiences, and they prompt a motivation to resolve a conflict which has become apparent during the reading process.

Levinson's distinction between two levels delves deeper into the details of the reading experience than Walton's account does. It stresses the influence of the reader's recalled memories on the quality of the reading experience. However, I hold that Levinson's explanation does not go far enough. The emotions which come with our memories are embedded in their own mini-stories, and these stories get tangled up in the other-narrative the reader generates during the reading process, developing into either a self-in-other-narrative or into an other-in-self-narrative if the emotions are strong enough.⁴³¹ Depending on the role the self plays in the ensuing narrative, different kinds of new emotions are likely to develop, most of them about the reader's self.

This is an aspect of fiction reading which is neglected by Walton. He acknowledges that we can have emotions when we engage with a work of fiction, but he does not investigate how this is influenced by our recalled memories, or what the target of these emotions is. In short: Walton says that during fiction reading, we can only have mental states that consist of quasi-emotions plus a make-belief, and that we care about these emotions because they enrich our lives. In my account, I claim that we can have both quasi-emotions towards characters(f) and strong real-life emotions towards ourselves when we engage with a work of fiction. These real-life emotions are not just

⁴²⁹ Levinson 1990, 79.

⁴³⁰ Levinson 1990, 79.

⁴³¹ see section 6.2.

an appreciation of quasi-emotions, as Walton claims. Often, real-life emotions are caused by recalled experiential memories. They can be intense, and they can persist after fiction reading. Hence, the reader adds more emotional content to the reading process than Walton allows.

2a) How does fiction reading contribute to our lives?

Walton says that the connection between fiction reading and the reader's real life, especially the benefit of participatory experiences, is something that still needs to be investigated in detail, in particular 'the specific ways in which participatory experiences contribute to our lives'.⁴³² In his search for the benefits of fiction reading he mentions the opportunities for trying out new roles, releasing unacceptable emotions, recognizing repressed feelings, facing disturbing aspects of ourselves, or gaining experience in dealing with specific situations. He wonders whether there is 'an evolutionary explanation of why human beings find experiences that do in fact produce insight exciting or enjoyable'.⁴³³

I concur with Walton's idea that the desire of humans to learn is something that can be investigated further, especially in empirical studies by psychologists or neuroscientists. From the philosophical angle, however, I think that Ricoeur's account of narrative identity provides the most interesting insight into the post-reading effects of fiction reading. I agree with Ricoeur that working out conflicts or trying out new roles are not isolated activities (as Walton represents them), but experiences that are closely woven together with the reader's self. In my own account, I explore these activities more deeply by defining the doppelgänger-function that monitors the other-narrative, letting it swing towards the self-in-other-narrative or the other-in-self-narrative. These narratives represent different kinds of reading experience, evoking in their turn different kinds of emotion which often persist after the reading process.

Thus, the reading experience can form the basis for extended self reflection and the long-term effects on the reader's goals and self-understanding, including a refiguration of her self-narrative. As the self-narrative is a practical identity needed for the interaction of the embodied self with the world and her social environment,⁴³⁴ a

⁴³² Walton 1990, 273.

⁴³³ Walton 1990, 272.

⁴³⁴ for details, see discussion in section 2.4.

fiction-reading induced refiguration of the self-narrative does indeed contribute to a person's life.

Ricoeur's model of narrative identity has given us the framework for the integration of fiction reading into the reader's lived self and her self-narrative. However, my account is an advance on Ricoeur's in that I explore the details in more depth, distinguishing between different reader narratives and different kinds of emotions. This is at least a partial answer to Walton's open question: I showed that fiction reading can contribute to our lives by changing our self-narrative, including our plans and commitments for the future. I do not attempt, however, to provide any answer to the question whether fiction reading can change the way we act; I leave these investigations to future empirical research by psychologists.

This overview shows the results of my discussions on how my own account can fill the gaps in Walton's account on the influence of fiction reading on the reader's self:

Reading process step	No.	Topic	Kendall Walton	My account
1 During the reading process: Engagement with a work of fiction with participation	a	What part do subsidiary imaginings play during fiction reading?	Subsidiary imaginings are an important part of one's reading experience and later meditations on the reading experience.	Subsidiary imaginings evoke experiential memories which influence the reading experience and later reflections on the self.
	b	What are emotions during fiction reading like?	Emotions during fiction reading are different from emotions experienced in real life, but we appreciate having them.	Emotions during fiction readings, together with emotions from re-lived memories, induce new real-life emotions.

Reading process step	No.	Topic	Kendall Walton	My account
2 After the reading process: Reflection after the reading process	a	How does fiction reading contribute to our lives?	Open question: how do participatory experiences contribute to our lives?	Participatory experiences can alert us to conflicts and create emotions that prompt us to change our commitments, and thus, refigure our narrative identity.

Figure 7: Reading process Walton 2

These are the most important points of my discussion: I hold that fiction reading does not only involve quasi-emotions, but also real-life emotions directed towards the reader herself; and I argue that the concept of narrative identity shows how fiction reading can contribute to the reader's own life via refiguration of her self-narrative, which is a practical identity.

10 Summary of Part III: The Simulated Self

In this main part of my work, I produced an account of the influence of fiction reading on the reader's self, which draws but also advances on Ricoeur's account of narrative identity. I investigated the effects of fiction reading both during and after the reading process. My theory covers two areas: the development of the emotional involvement of the fiction reader, and the process of self-reflection and self-refiguration after the reading process. I claim that Ricoeur's account of fiction reading does not fully explain how and why the reader experiences emotions during and after the reading process. Ricoeur says that learning from fiction leads to self-reflection. This is not plausible: learning increases our knowledge, but it does not motivate us to re-think our lives. The important question is: what can spark the motivation for self-reflection? In my own account of fiction reading, I explore the different kinds of narrative a fiction reader weaves during the reading process, and the kinds of emotion that can be evoked by these narratives.

I hold that emotions often have a complicated structure (which Ricoeur does not recognize), and that they frequently have a narrative quality. In chapter 5, I explained that my view is compatible with any theory which says that an emotion is intentional, complex, and structured.

In chapter 6, I investigated how the reading process deepens into a reading experience when the fiction reader feels sympathy or empathy, caused by her engagement with a character(f). Starting from Ricoeur's interpretation of fiction reading as an 'imaginative variation of our ego',⁴³⁵ I examined how emotions can be evoked during fiction reading, and what these emotions are about. I showed that the reading process has an experiential quality for the reader, and that this experience in itself can trigger a chain of new emotions in the reader, many of them self-directed.

Regarding the development of self-directed emotions, I took encouragement from the empirical tests performed by psychologists who questioned readers on the emotions that they felt after reading examples from works of fiction. Their test results indicated that in almost all cases, the fiction reader experienced self-conscious emotions after the reading process. Taking up this idea, I suggested that the reader's emotions are not created as a direct result of imagining something fictional, but as part of a

⁴³⁵ Ricoeur 2011, 437.

subsequent chain of emotions which develops from the engagement of the reader with the fictional story. The full engagement with the story is possible only if the reader fills the gaps with her own experiential memories, which are linked to her personal history in which they originally occurred. Thus, both the experience of reading a work of fiction and the experience of re-living one's own memories are woven into the reader's engagement with the work of fiction.

The thought that the act of reading is an experience in itself, interwoven with the narratives of the reader's experiential memories, is under-represented in the fiction reading models of both Ricoeur and Walton. The addition allows for a deeper analysis of the reader's experience and its time frame. Why are some reading-induced emotions longer-lasting, and more disturbing, than others?

My claim is that identifying with a character(f) from within is a typical source for strong reading-induced emotions. Using examples from literary fiction, I investigated how, and under what circumstances, sympathy and empathy with a character(f) can promote the emergence of self-conscious emotions in the reader.

How do the emotions enter the reading process? Ricoeur and Walton say that the reader creates her own narrative, her own interpretation of the text, and Walton acknowledges that the reader has imaginings that run alongside the mandated narrative of the text. I showed that this distinction is not detailed enough to explain the different chains of reading-induced emotions. In my view, the fiction reader creates three levels of narrative during the reading process: the other-narrative, the self-in-other-narrative, and the other-in-self-narrative.

The first of these does not involve any variation of the reader's ego: the other-narrative consists of the story of a character(f) understood by the reader, based on the hints given by the work of fiction. To build the other-narrative, the reader applies her experience of the world and her knowledge of cultural customs to the fictional text, but she does not need to project herself into the story. She appreciates the story, and she may feel sympathy with characters(f).

The self-in-other-narrative and the other-in-self-narrative develop from the other-narrative the reader creates for a character(f). They usually evolve when the fiction reader imagines a character from within. I showed that Ricoeur's 'imaginative variations of our ego' can be explained in more depth by studying the web of stories the reader creates during the reading process. The reader enters the narrative during her empathy with the character(f), bolstering up her imaginings of this character(f) with her

own experiential memories. These memories bring their own mini-stories with them, which then become part of the reading experience. By imagining a character(f) from inside, the reader slides into the fictional world, entangled with her experiential memories, and develops emotions about her own self. During this process, it is possible that the reader is either envious or desirous of the character(f)'s actions, or disgusted by them. In the first case, the reader imagines new views and ways of living (which are compliant with her ethical values) through the character(f), and the other-narrative swings towards a self-in-other-narrative. In the second case, the character(f) leads the reader on to paths the reader would not have dared or wanted to tread in real life, thus turning the self-in-other-narrative into an other-in-self-narrative. As the reader can switch between these two self-involving narratives within the same reading experience, I call this process the 'doppelgänger-function'.

The doppelgänger function is constantly on the look-out for similarities between the reader and the character(f), thus influencing the direction of the reader's imagination. I hold that my concept of the doppelgänger function is a fine-tuned tool to distinguish in which directions the imaginative variations of the fiction reader's self may go. As shown with the example of John William's *Stoner*, the self-in-other end of the doppelgänger function tends to cause emotions about situations in which we found ourselves in the past, whereas the other-in-self end typically leads to either a fleeting elation or a concern about a lesson newly learned, or shame about an unwelcome connection understood. So my distinction of the three types of narratives, monitored by the doppelgänger function, gives an explanation of how different kinds of self-conscious emotion can evolve from fiction reading.

As a next step, in chapter 7, I investigated the effects of fiction-induced emotions on the reader's self-reflection. I showed that self-conscious emotions like shame, guilt, embarrassment or pride are often generated during the reading process with participation, in particular through sympathy or empathy with a character(f), for two main reasons: detachment from the reader's current real-life concerns, and the possibility of risk-free imagination. I argued that these self-conscious emotions can result from the three different kinds of narrative discussed in chapter 6: the other-narrative, the self-in-other-narrative, or the other-in-self-narrative. Reading-induced emotions have an important feature in common: they are – in the end – mainly about myself, the reader.

Self-conscious emotions already contain a nucleus of self-scrutiny when they are invoked. This is why they have a high influence on a reader's motivation to engage in subsequent self-reflection: they draw the reader's attention towards unresolved conflicts in their self-narrative.

In chapter 8, I discussed the differences between Ricoeur's account of fiction reading and my own. Regarding the reading process itself, I argued that Ricoeur misses two important points: first, his view of catharsis is too simple to represent the complex chain of emotions which are triggered by fiction reading, and second, he does not attach sufficient importance to the impact of experiential memories which the reader recalls during fiction reading. Hence, he has no convincing explanation of how the reader comes to reflect on the fictional worlds she got to know. In my account, I filled these gaps. First, I showed how different kinds of emotions emerge during the three types of narrative the reader creates when engaging with a work of fiction. Second, I explained why many of these emotions are self-conscious, and hence possible starting points for self-doubts.

Regarding the reader's self-reflection after the reading process, I argued that Ricoeur's account seems over-optimistic regarding the benefits of fiction reading. Ricoeur says that self-reflection will guide the dialectic between counterfactual actions and the story one has woven about one's own life towards a revaluation of the self. His account seems to suggest that fiction reading is always beneficial to us, leading us in the direction of a unified life and better social integration. As I pointed out, this is the ideal path of self-reflection, but self-reflection can work in different ways. It can – as Ricoeur suggests – challenge our values, it can challenge our self-narrative, and it can make us more discerning in our social relationships.

If, however, the reader's self-narrative is severely distorted when she engages with a work of fiction, her subsequent self-reflection will be based on wrong premises. I showed that readers with a biased self-narrative are likely to react only to parts of the fictional work which support their erroneous conception of their own life. In such cases, the self-narrative will not have much chance of refiguration. I pointed out that Ricoeur's account does not include this possibility. Ricoeur holds that self-reflection can only lead to an improved self-unity. In my own account, I showed that self-reflection can only do that if it is based on a realistic self-narrative.

In chapter 9, I tackled two points in Walton's account of fiction reading which are open to questions. First, I challenged Walton's view of the reader's emotions during

fiction reading. Walton says that during fiction reading, our emotions are only felt within the fiction. I showed that the reading experience and the recall of experiential memories can trigger a chain of real emotions in the reader. In my account, I explored how and when experiential memories can enter the reader's narrative, transform it, and evoke a chain of self-conscious emotions which exist outside the reading experience.

Second, I pointed out that the relationship between fiction-induced emotions and self-reflection can contribute to the reader's life by influencing the way she refigures her self-narrative. Walton says that this point is still to be explored. I showed that self-conscious emotions which evolve during the reading process can persist and start a process of reflection, during which the reader can rewrite her own story and, if it is realistic, gain a fuller unity of life.

Overall, the main benefit of my account of fiction reading is that it accounts for the creation and the influence of self-conscious emotions which are generated during the reading process, and which can continue after reading. My account addresses a new topic: the interactive influence of fiction reading and the fiction reader's narrative identity on each other.

11 Glossary

Attestation: in connection with personal identity: confirming one's memories, one's actions, and one's body as one's own.

BCA: Bodily Continuity Account, claims that a person's identity over time consists in the identity of her body.

Character(f): a fictional person in a work of fiction.

Character(mf): a meta-fictional person, who is not involved in the fictional narrative but with whom a reader engages when reading a work of fiction, usually the **inferred author**.

Character(p): character as an aspect of personal identity: the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized (durable, belonging to the **idem**).

Conflict: a situation where there is a significant difference between what I believe to be the case and what I desire to be the case.

Dialectic: a struggle between two positions, in the course of which each is becoming clearer, approaching a conclusion to end the **conflict**.

Doppelgänger function: a general human capability that works as a monitor, constantly switched on, alerted to find relations between the reader and the character(f).

Emotional disposition: tendency to react with certain emotions under certain conditions.

Emotional episode: series of emotional reactions extended over time and organized around an underlying theme.

Emotional experience: combined phenomenological feeling (including bodily sensations as well as psychological feelings) caused by an **emotional reaction** or an **emotional episode**.

Emotional reaction: short-term emotional response, which might last for a few seconds or a few minutes.

Ethical subjectivity: a person's ability to act according to her personal aims, preferences and values. This ability is shaped and developed in a person's interaction with her social nexus and its prevailing value system.

Event schema: the conceptualization of past experience. In memory, the events are structured into a recognizable script.

Fiction: a story the content of which was not constrained by fidelity to reality.

Idem: one of the two aspects of personal identity: the durable **self**, the answer to the question 'what?'.

Iff: philosophical term for 'if and only if'.

Inferred author: each reader's own version of the **implied author**.

Implied author: the author who is implied by the genre and style of the work of fiction, by the choices of theme, point of view, protagonist, story structure, vocabulary and general setting.

Intentional content: content of an intentional state. Can be descriptive or directive, or a combination of both (appraisals).

Intentional state: a mental state that is directed towards an object, or a state of affairs.

Iipse: one of the two aspects of personal identity: the lived **self**, the answer to the question 'who?'.

Mimesis: Imitation of action.

Mood: an affective state that is more ‘global’ or ‘diffuse’ than emotion.

Narrative: a representation or specific manifestation of a **story**.

NIA: Narrative Identity Account, claims that a person shapes her sense of herself by weaving the events of her life together in an ongoing autobiographical **narrative**.

NIDA: Narrative Identity Descriptive Account, claims that every person weaves her autobiographical **narrative** without the need of a specific intention to do so.

NINA: Narrative Identity Normative Account, claims that a person benefits from weaving her autobiographical **narrative**.

Other-narrative: one of the **narratives** that can emerge during **fiction** reading: story that the reader weaves for a character(f).

Other-in-self-narrative: one of the **narratives** that can emerge during **fiction** reading: the other (in this case the character(f)) influences the way the self views herself and her own values.

PCA: Psychological Connectedness Account, claims that a person’s identity over time consists in connectedness or continuity of her psychological states.

Self: short for “the lived **self**”, the conscious human being in interaction with the physical and social world.

Self-narrative: the ongoing story of the **self**. The self-narrative provides the practical identity needed for the interaction of the embodied self with the world.

Self-in-other-narrative: one of the **narratives** that can emerge during **fiction** reading: the self of the reader enters the story of the fictional ‘other’ by adopting her emotional experiences.

Story: an account of people and events, can be either fictional or non-fictional.

Target of an emotion: the particular that the emotion is directed at.

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